

TLS

THE TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT

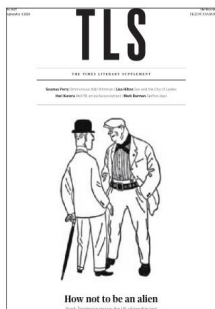
Seamus Perry Omnivorous Walt Whitman | **Lisa Hilton** Sex and the City of Ladies

Hari Kunzru *Red Pill*, an exclusive extract | **Mark Burman** Spitfire days



How not to be an alien

Frank Trentmann passes the UK citizenship test



Cover illustration from *How to be an Alien* by George Mikes © Nicolas Bentley, courtesy of Michael Joseph

In this issue

David Cameron's favourite childhood book was Henrietta Marshall's *Our Island Story*, which covered the history of England from the Roman invasion until Queen Victoria's death. Its benign narrative of historical events inspired the wonderful satire *1066 and All That* which chronicled "bad barons" and "good kings", "wrong but romantic Cavaliers" and "right but repulsive Roundheads", until the country became "top nation".

According to Professor Frank Trentmann, author of our cover feature this week, *How Not To Be an Alien*, the cheery, propagandistic spirit of Marshall lives on in the Home Office's naturalization tests. Perhaps that's not so surprising as the tests came into force under the Cameron government and have been further modified by Boris Johnson.

So, the British liberated the Normandy beaches on D-Day without the help of American and Canadian troops, slavery "prospered" here, decolonization was a walk in the park - sorry, Ireland - and the Holocaust just didn't happen. Top nation again, it seems.

Two years ago Trentmann passed his Britishness test. Now no longer an alien, he urges us to protest against the whitewashing of history by careless civil servants and wilfully ignorant politicians.

Elsewhere in our history-themed issue, Lisa Hilton is inspired by the Italian-born, French medieval writer Christine de Pisan, "the first woman to take up her pen in defence of her sex", according to Simone de Beauvoir. In an extract from her new book, *Sex and the City of Ladies*, published under the TLS imprint, Hilton dreams of some great women from the past who can't gain admittance to Pisan's City because they fail to conform to virtuous type. But what Lucrezia Borgia, Catherine the Great and Cleopatra lack in conventional piety they more than make up in genuine female empowerment.

Fed up with the clash of Trump versus Biden? Don't be. Perhaps what you mistake for sound and fury is actually "the new non-aristocratic sublime".

"Much of the marvellous swagger of Walt Whitman is dedicated ... to showing that democracy can also strike a high heroic note; that there can be a new non-aristocratic sublime", writes Seamus Perry in these pages, reviewing Mark Doty's *What is the Grass*, a personal appreciation of Whitman's genius. Emerson prophesied that a great American poet would one day arise to do justice to the young nation's plenitude. Whitman took up the challenge and changed the way we think about the new world, sexuality and commerce. He changed Doty's life and poetry too. Read him and he may change yours.

MARTIN IVENS
Editor

Find us on

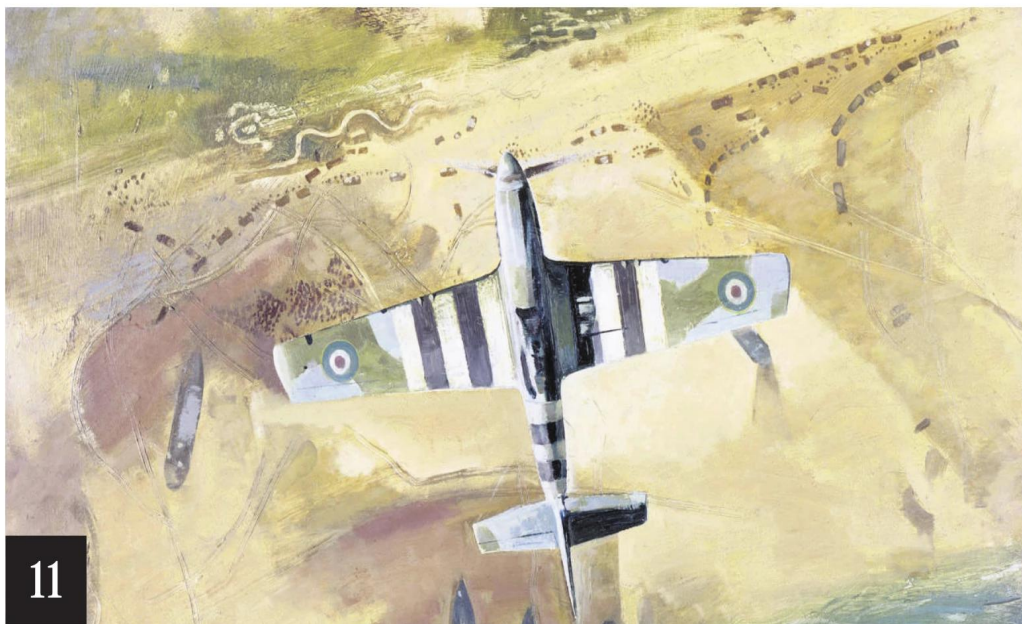
www.the-tls.co.uk

Times Literary Supplement

@the.tls

@TheTLS

To buy any book featured in this week's TLS, go to shop.the-tls.co.uk



11



16

Clockwise from top left: "Invasion Pattern Normandy", by Eric Aldwinkle, c.1945; The pages of a book; A poster for the Tangerine Dream album *Stratosfear*; A pregnant woman with a laptop; A still from *My Rembrandt*; "Cleopatra Testing Poisons on Condemned Prisoners", Alexandre Cabanel, 1887



19



4	POETRY	SEAMUS PERRY	What Is the Grass - Walt Whitman in my life Mark Doty
6	LETTERS TO THE EDITOR		Edward Thomas's Welshness, Desportes and Acker, Nabokov's Pushkin, etc
7	HISTORY	FRANK TRENTMANN LESLEY CHAMBERLAIN RICHARD VINEN MARK BURMAN MARGARET MESERVE	Britain first - The official history of the United Kingdom, according to the Home Office The Spark That Lit the Revolution - Lenin in London and the politics that changed the world Robert Henderson The Human Factor - Gorbachev, Reagan and the end of the Cold War Archie Brown The Buried Spitfires of Burma - A 'fake' history Andy Brockman and Tracy Spaight . Secret Spitfires - Britain's hidden civilian army Ethem Cetintas and Karl Howman . To Defeat the Few - The Luftwaffe's campaign to destroy RAF Fighter Command August-September 1940 Douglas C. Dildy and Paul Crickmore . Lancaster - The forging of a very British legend John Nichol Useful Enemies - Islam and the Ottoman Empire in Western political thought, 1450-1750 Noel Malcolm
14	POLITICS	DANIEL JOHNSON	Why the Germans Do It Better - Notes from a grown-up country John Kampfner
16	EXTRACT	LISA HILTON	Poison in jest - An unexpected encounter with three lively dead women
18	FREELANCE	D. J. TAYLOR	Books that got away - The various reasons why a manuscript remains unpublished
19	ARTS	ELIZABETH LOWRY HENRY HITCHINGS IAN THOMSON	My Rembrandt (Various cinemas and on demand) Playing by Ear - Reflections on sound and music Peter Brook . As If by Chance - Journeys, theatres, lives David Lan Force Majeure - Tangerine Dream - The autobiography Edgar Froese ; Translated by Paul Bonin
22	FICTION	NORMA CLARKE GEORGE BERRIDGE ROBERT DOUGLAS-FAIRHURST	Islands of Mercy Rose Tremain The Abstainer Ian McGuire The Dickens Boy Thomas Keneally
24	EXTRACT	HARI KUNZRU	Tortuous sentences - An extract from <i>Red Pill</i>
26	POETRY	AMELIA GLASER	There's no there there - Political poetry from Eastern Europe on Facebook
27	TRAVEL	OLIVER BALCH	Shadow City - A woman walks Kabul Taran Khan
28	LITERARY CRITICISM	HAL JENSEN KATHRYN SUTHERLAND	When Novels Were Books Jordan Alexander Stein . The Secret Life of Books - Why they mean more than words Tom Mole Literary Manuscript Culture in Romantic Britain Michelle Levy
30	SOCIAL STUDIES	JANE ROBINSON JULIA BUENO	Double Lives - A history of working motherhood in modern Britain Helen McCarthy . The Double X Economy - The epic potential of empowering women Linda Scott Early - An intimate history of premature birth and what it teaches us about being human Sarah DiGregorio
32	IN BRIEF		How To Be a Modern Samurai - Ten steps to finding your power and achieving success Antony Cummins . The Nature of the Page - Poetry, papermaking and the ecology of texts in Renaissance England Joshua Calhoun . The Pharmacist Justin David . Miss Aluminium Susanna Moore . Salvage at Twilight Dan Burt . The Outsider - Pope Francis and his battle to reform the Church Christopher Lamb . The Films That Made Me ... Peter Bradshaw
34	FROM THE ARCHIVE		Theodore K. Rabb on <i>The Coming of the Book</i> by Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin (TLS October 14, 1977)
35	CROSSWORD		
36	NB	J. C.	Roosevelt the writer, The Dos Passos Prize, The Penn Club

'America is a poem in our eyes'

Walt Whitman, universal poet

SEAMUS PERRY

WHAT IS THE GRASS

Walt Whitman in my life

MARK DOTY

304pp. Cape. £16.99.



THE FIRST OF THE MANY editions of Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* (1855) was an idiosyncratic production in several ways, not least in that it barely mentioned its author's name at all. A legal notice on the back of the title page recorded in a minute font that "WALTER WHITMAN" was the person who had entered the title in the Clerk's office of the District Court for the Southern District of New York; but the title page itself bore no name. Instead, facing it was a small engraving of what a reader would presumably, and rightly, have assumed to be the author: a bearded man with a large hat set at a jaunty angle, an open-necked shirt offering a glimpse of his vest, and labourer's trousers. This was a studied piece of self-invention for a man who was actually a printer, a jobbing journalist, and the author of an ignorable novel. Late in life he was asked why he didn't have his name on the title page: "It would have been like putting a name on the universe", he replied.

Mark Doty has written a warm and intelligent account of Whitman, interweaving his personal responses to the poetry with autobiographical episodes, the lives and deaths of partners and friends and pets, and even, possibly, a spooky encounter with young Walt himself, who, at an intense moment, gazes through the features of a lover "with the visionary dazzle of starlight in his eyes". ("I saw what I saw", Doty says, a little defensively.) Doty describes *Leaves of Grass* as "a kind of collaboration with totality", and totality is a lot to take on, of course: writers more normally choose to write about something and not something else, but Whitman became Whitman when he realized that his subject was everything. "To think that the sun rose in the east ... that men and women were flexible and real and alive ... that every thing was real and alive": Whitman's ellipses aren't marking something left out so much as indicating everything that could, in principle, be let in.

This informing sense of life's heady totality was in part a lesson he learnt from Emerson, whose influence, Whitman later said, had finally brought him to the boil. Emerson's essays and lectures somehow combined swooping claims of all-absorbing monism ("the resolution of all into the ever-blessed ONE") with an exhortation to his audience to make themselves as fully individual as possible ("Insist on yourself"). Absolutely everything joins up with absolutely everything else in the Emersonian universe ("from any one object the parts and properties of any other may be predicted") and it was to be the American poet's job to celebrate "the great and constant fact of Life, which can dwarf any and every circumstance, and to which the belt of wampum and the commerce of America are alike". Such a poet, however, was yet to arise, Emerson told his readers, as though issuing a challenge - and Whitman for one seems to have taken his words as a job description. As Doty says, Emerson's words proved "electrifying".

Whitman's response to Emerson's writings was

certainly heartfelt, even if in later years he came to think them "pretty thin": their principal function had been to unlock something in him much more intuitive than the adoption of a persuasive philosophical viewpoint. Emerson's joyful stoicism was not peculiarly American, needless to say. In one way it was the new iteration of a very ancient creed, as Emerson's respectful references to Marcus Aurelius and Seneca and others suggest; and there was little in his writings that, say, the young Coleridge, who mused about "the latency of all in each", or the sagacious Tennyson of "The Higher Pantheism", would not have appreciated. The magic new ingredient was America itself. When Whitman heard Emerson announce in a lecture that "America is a poem in our eyes; its ample geography dazzles the imagination, and it will not wait long for metres", something, as David Bromwich once said, must have changed inside him for good. "The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem", Whitman in turn proclaimed, pouring his Emersonian excitement into the "Preface" to *Leaves of Grass*, a document of such exuberance about the power and reach of the poetic imagination that it makes Shelley's "Defence of Poetry" sound like the voice of English reticence.

America was everything to Whitman. The idea of it, what he called "the theory of America", was compelling to him in a primitive and spontaneous way to do with its sheer immensity and the fact that it was getting bigger and bigger all the time. He confidently anticipated Canada and Cuba joining other new states of the Union in due course, a territorial expansiveness which exemplified the American quality he commended as "the boundless impatience of restraint". For most of us "interminable" is not a term of admiration; Whitman has no higher praise for American agriculture than to eulogize "thy interminable farms, North, South". Within this expanding new world a lot of very different things were happening all at once: many of the greatest Whitman passages are full of the sheer thrill of simultaneity, the overwhelming sense of what George Santayana nicely called "a multiplicity of things spread endlessly around me". He is, as everyone knows, the great poet of the catalogue, the laureate of a world that, as Randall Jarrell put it, "streams over us joined only by ands".

Paul Zweig, his excellent biographer, said that Whitman was baffling because he was at once "a hack and yet also America's most original poet", and the big thing the hack may have brought to the poetry was the present-tense coincidence of miscellaneous human endeavour and accident that constitutes every page of a newspaper. For Whitman, more means more. "Births have brought us richness and variety", he tells us, "And other births will bring us richness and variety." He loves both human and animal bodies and the whole great natural fact of energy, and nothing American is alien to him: "Such gliding wonders! such sights and sounds! / Such

join'd unended links, each hook'd to the next". He is also very keen on the phenomenon of people simply being busy ("Muscle and pluck forever!") and, although he sounds a cautionary Emersonian note from time to time about the "mania of owning things", he is not squeamish about celebrating the details of actual mercantile business, what he calls "the oceanic, variegated, intense practical energy, the demand for facts, even the business materialism of the current age, our States" in his essay *Democratic Vistas* (1871):

House-building, measuring, sawing the boards,
Blacksmithing, glass-blowing, nail-making, cooper-
ing, tin-roofing, shingle-dressing,
Ship-joining, dock-building, fish-curing, flagging of
sidewalks by flaggers,
The pump, the pile-driver, the great derrick, the
coal-kiln and brick-kiln,

Coal-mines and all that is down there ...

You see why Jarrell called him "participle-loving Whitman".

Like many people in the nineteenth century, Whitman thought the triumph of democracy was inevitable ("the destin'd conqueror") and America its principal agent, though unlike many he did not regard the prospect with foreboding. He revered the American Constitution because, in his eyes, it enacted in its own way the thrilling diversity and numinous oneness that lay at the heart of his perpetually improvisatory metaphysics. *E pluribus unum*, as it says on the coins, but with the emphasis quite as much on the *plures* as the *unum*: "And a song make I of the One form'd out of all", as he put it in his nation-building poem "Starting from Paumanok". The play between delighted individuality ("I dote on myself, there is a lot of me and all so luscious") and reverence for some greater allness ("I take part, I see and hear the whole") that forms the stuff of his poems found a kind of metaphor in the relationship between central government and the individual states so that, as he says in *Democratic Vistas*, the nation is at once characterized by "powerful compaction" and by the "full and free swing" of the separate states. "See the Identity formed out of thirty-six spacious and haughty States, (and many more to come)", he proclaimed in "Song of the Banner at Daybreak"; but by then Whitman had followed his country through the horror of civil war, which was for him as much a crisis of imaginative vision as it was a humanitarian calamity since it showed the One failing very badly indeed.

Many of the later poems take up the strain of joining things back together again, protesting against the endurance of "my ever-united lands ... ONE IDENTITY". The to-and-fro between singular and plural in such phrases reflects the unresolved grammar of the noun "the United States": does it take is or are? To say that they "themselves are essentially the greatest poem" emphasizes their plurality while at the same time likening them to the singleness of a poem. "Thou Union holding all, fusing, absorbing, tolerat-

“
Whitman became Whitman when he realized his subject was everything

Seamus Perry is a Fellow of Balliol College, Oxford. He is writing a *Life of W. H. Auden*

ing all, / Thee, ever thee, I sing", Whitman wrote in "Song of the Exposition", a lofty poem recited at the 1871 exhibition of the Managers American Institute. The poem struck a modern note in more ways than one: at one point, he charmingly hails the American Muse "install'd amid the kitchen ware".

How exactly the unmitigated proliferation of individuals created something that nevertheless hung together as a political unity was a natural question for many who contemplated the novelty of the American scene: "Equality places men beside one another without a common bond to hold them", as Tocqueville observes in *Democracy in America*. Whitman has several attempts to nominate what might do the job. In *Democratic Vistas* he suggests that, like the human body, or indeed "any object in this manifold universe", the US might be "best kept together by the simple miracle of its own cohesion", which does not seem exactly explanatory. Sometimes he posits an "adhesive love" that might pull all this newfound sublimity together. "Affection shall solve the problems of Freedom yet", he writes with a real poignancy in "Over the Carnage rose Prophetic a Voice", one of the extraordinary poems in the *Drum Taps* sequence, inspired by his experience of the war; and, as his sense of things darkened, his hope yet remained that "the institution of the dear love of comrades", a kind of soldierly bond, such as was displayed during those dark days, might yet serve as "the counterbalance and offset of our materialistic and vulgar American democracy".

Doty writes with much tact and sympathy about the ways Whitman's diffuse idea of a general camaraderie connects with his passionate but elusive sexuality, "a free-floating, unfettered homosexual practice ... both amative and adhesive at once". He is not starry-eyed, though: he once wrote a verse epistle to Whitman, attractively full of warmth and gratitude, but duly sceptical of a social vision of "democratic America joined by / mutual delight in the beauty of boys, / especially working-class ones". Although it finds itself doing work of a roughly political kind, Whitman's adhesive love is really of much more private stuff. His was, as Eliot discerned, "a perception, of strange intensity, of a relationship between individuals by which he wanted society to be governed". And that intensity could be torturing as well as delightful. Doty quotes a notebook entry recorded by Whitman after some turbulence in his relationship with Peter Doyle, the Irish streetcar conductor with whom he seems to have fallen in love: "*Depress the adhesive nature - It is in excess - making life a torment ...*".

The *Drum Taps* poems, which do not seem to interest Doty much, are striking as the work of someone constitutionally bound to optimism facing evidence of the most overwhelming kind that all is not at all well: to maintain, as Whitman elsewhere does, "What will be will be, for what is well" ("To Think of Time"), is to speak in a way that risks the charge of misjudgement. It is not exactly exoneration to say that the risk is often run quite knowingly. Whitman says, in his beautiful poem "The Sleepers", "The universe is duly in order ... every thing is in its place", and in that poem so they are, the usual cruelty of waking life momentarily suspended; but elsewhere Whitman goes out of his way to work elements into his catalogues of simultaneity that one might reasonably find troubling:

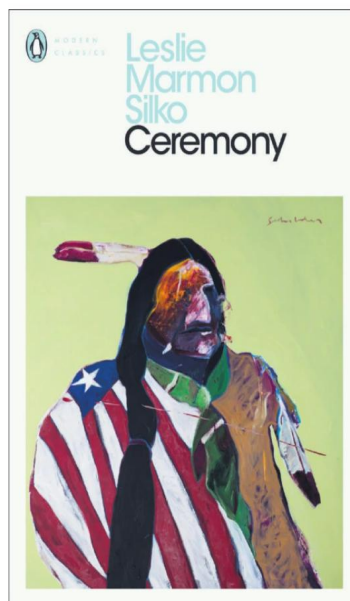
The jour printer with gray head and gaunt jaws
works at his case,
He turns his quid of tobacco while his eyes blurr
with the manuscript;
The malfom'd limbs are tied to the surgeon's table,
What is removed drops horribly in a pail;
The quadron girl is sold at the auction-stand, the
drunkard nods by the bar-room stove,
The machinist rolls up his sleeves, the policeman
travels his beat, the gate-keeper marks who pass ...
"He judges not as the judge judges but as the sun
falling around a helpless thing", wrote Whitman of
the poet in the preface to *Leaves of Grass*; and, generally, his imagination is studiously, even programmatically, non-judgemental to a unique degree: "Of

criminals - To me, any judge, or any juror, is equally criminal" ("Thoughts"). You don't have to believe in the infallibility of the justice system to see there's something difficult in the claim of complete equivalence there, as there is in the way the "quadron girl" takes her place among other objects in the rich diversity of life. Whitman was disgusted by slavery: it is because he is so disgusted by it that his ability to work it in here ("of these one and all I weave the song of myself") is so noteworthy; but you might wonder whether accepting the girl at the slave auction along with everything else is not to embrace the totality of life in a way which feels less than fully heedful of how someone else might experience things - the girl in this case, reduced to the passivity of a tradeable commodity.

Nonetheless, much of the marvellous swagger of Whitman is dedicated to refuting Tocqueville and showing that democracy can also strike a high heroic note; that there can be a new non-aristocratic sublime of the figure he apostrophizes in "Starting from Paumanok" - "O divine average!" "I will report all heroism from an American point of view", he says in what is perhaps my single favourite line. To say that America is a poem is to honour it, but it is also to suggest that a poem may be in some way organized like a nation, and the form of *Leaves of Grass*, as it progressed through a bewildering number of revisions and amendments, a never-ending

“
The form of
Leaves of Grass
is self-
consciously an
attempt to
make up a
democratic
aesthetic

‘He had to get back where he could
merge with the walls and the ceiling,
shimmering white, remote from
everything’



project, at once a single thing and a multiplicity of parts, its wandering lines like the long lines of people on Broadway, is self-consciously an attempt to make up a democratic aesthetic. The result has divided opinion. Yvor Winters thought Whitman lost himself in a basic fallacy "trying to express a loose America by writing loose poetry", and Auden surely had Whitman in mind when he regretted the experiment that some poets had undertaken to write verse that emulated "a political democracy" and which was, as a consequence, "formless, windy, banal and utterly boring". A vote against there; but then what Auden describes is evidently very much the same phenomenon that C. K. Williams contemplated in his likeable little book *On Whitman* (2010) and celebrated as "that wonderfully gappy unorganized organization". Whitman's growing fears about the incoherence of America - "the lack of a common skeleton, knitting all close, continually haunts me", he said - resemble the terms of complaint of those critics who lament his looseness: he devised a democratic aesthetic all too well.

It is true that Whitman conceived his vocation as strenuously public, the taking on of a national duty, but I think Jarrell was right to suggest that actually his genius was entirely peculiar: he was not really a rhetorician at all, said Jarrell, "but a poet of the greatest and oddest delicacy and originality and sensitivity as far as words are concerned".

Sure as the most certain sure, plumb in the uprights,
well entretied, braced in the beams,
Stout as a horse, affectionate, haughty, electrical,
I and this mystery here we stand.

How much work is done here by that wonderful string of unpredictable epithets, declaimed to the universe at large but crackling with the hidden energy of a wholly private association.

Is Doty Whitmanian? His poems are a highly engaging mixture of the quotidian and the numinous: they are discursive, even essayistic, anecdotal in a nicely contrived throwaway manner which sets off perfectly their discoveries of loveliness amid the ordinary. You can see how a poet poised for "some secret amplitude" ("Fog") would celebrate Whitman as the laureate of what Doty calls "everythingness", as well as in his capacity as the author of "the most open of texts of same-sex love in his time". And there are certainly Whitmanian resonances to be found in his work. Whitman, as he tells us in *What is the Grass*, was a "maximalist, a fan of multiplicity", and in his own poem "Theory of Multiplicity" Doty records the fleeting intuition that his 16th Street laundromat is less a material thing than the sum of all the experiences that people have had of it, a very democratic piece of metaphysics: "I felt in that moment / not dissolved in anything, not selfless, but joined / in a layering of singularities - a multiplicity // not God, exactly, that theoretical viewpoint, / but a satisfying gesture in that direction".

But the hesitations in that don't feel very Whitmanian. They are part of what makes the thing precious, implying an experience too exquisite to be pinned down, and Doty's best poems are often like that, reports back from a life of tasteful self-scrutiny, and much more purposefully exquisite than Whitman ever is. Whitman loved Italian opera in all its lush and vulgar extravagance; Doty's preferred form is the still life. (He has a charming short book about the genre, a sort of rapt love letter to Jan Davidz de Heem's "Still Life with Oysters and Lemons".) However private the springs of his imagination, Whitman, in his idiosyncratic way, saw himself fulfilling a civic duty, but Doty would never dream of adopting heroic nationalism as a poetic mode, and indeed he expresses regret in *What is the Grass* about Whitman's committed "project as American bard". But engage with the American bard he must, as perhaps all American poets must in one way or another, in much the same way that no English poet of the eighteenth century could really get going without grappling with Milton. "He defines for us the project of poetry, its possibilities, its parameters", as C. K. Williams writes, on behalf of American poets in general. "It's not necessary to refer to him: he's there." ■

Henry B. Fuller and Lucia Fairchild

The painter Henry B. Fuller may have had a personal reason for criticizing Mary Cassatt's "impudent greens and brutal blues" in her mural in the Women's Building at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair (see Sophie Madeline Dess's article, *Arts*, August 14), for he was married to the competition, the rather tame mural called "Women at Plymouth" by his wife, Lucia Fairchild. Fuller and Fairchild had met in Boston in 1888 in a drawing class at the Cowles School of Art. "I like little Lucia Fairchild very much." He was twenty-one, she sixteen, and though the portraitist John Singer Sargent, who was a family friend to the Fairchilds, cautioned against the union, they married, in October 1893, with another Fairchild family friend, Robert Louis Stevenson, writing congratulations from Samoa. Fuller's taste in subjects ran to allegory. "The Triumph of Truth over Error" won the Carnegie Medal for the finest painting in the National Academy of Design show in 1907; the title was taken from a saying by the founder of Christian Science, Mary Baker Eddy. But allegory did not pay the bills, and Lucia specialized in painting miniatures, some 200 portraits in a form that Sargent called the "butter of vanity".

For many other reasons, I am grateful to the Fairchilds for peopling my book, *Château Higginson: Social life in Boston's Back Bay, 1870-1920* (2017). They have two chapters, and Stevenson, one. As their house guest, he came under Lucia's keen eye, and her diaries record that he mumbled in his sleep, hated Dickens, played whole acts of Wagner's operas on the piano, loving his "great cosmic chords", and, when showing the Fairchilds through the Louvre, said Leonardo had painted better pictures than the Mona Lisa. The "Château" of my title was the first important apartment building in the United States. Americans, unless tenement-poor, did not live stacked up over one another, but in 1872, Henry Lee Higginson, later to found the Boston Symphony Orchestra in 1881, commissioned a building of six "French flats" for his well-travelled fellow Bostonians. Each flat had the unimagined luxury of three WCs. They were a huge success.

In 1889, the Fairchilds could look across Commonwealth Avenue and watch another apartment house go up. It was called The Abbotsford, and, thanks to Lindsay Duguid's review (July 31) of books about the homes of famous writers, I think I can say this was named for Walter Scott's dwelling that became "longer and higher and more turreted and crenellated" as his novels took on grander themes. Higginson preferred the plain in architecture and women, but his tenants may have dipped into Scott.

■ **Margo Miller**
Boston, Massachusetts

Edward Thomas's Welshness

Alex Diggins, in his excellent review of the *Cambridge History of Welsh Literature*, edited by Geraint Evans and Helen Fulton (August 14), highlights the "outsized poetic presence of the two Thomases, Dylan and R. S.". I was left unclear, though, as to whether the book also included a third Thomas: Edward? While he was born in Surrey and wrote apparently quintessential English travelogues and poems, like "Adlestrop", that reek of hot June days in southern England, his children were called Merfyn, Bronwen and Myfanwy. A sense of being, at least in part, Welsh was clearly important to him.

To be sure, his relationship with his (literally) "land of my fathers" was ambiguous. Matthew Hollis in his fine biography *Now All Roads Lead to France* quotes Thomas in correspondence with a friend, John Freeman, "You shan't label me Welsh whatever you do..."; he definitely didn't "own it", as the other Thomases did. That may have been partly the time: the Welsh Knot was still used in schools to discourage Welsh-speaking; "Taffy was a Welshman, Taffy was a thief" was a playground call; and while pre-First World War, there were the first modern stirrings of Welsh national consciousness, Edward Thomas was killed in action, eight years before Plaid Cymru was even formed in 1925.

And yet Thomas's writing is redolent with a sense of a writer dislocated from his homeland. To the Welsh, England is "Loegr", the "lost lands", as well as being the source of the language that displaced Welsh,

not just in England, but in Wales itself. It is a source of double loss therefore, and some ambiguity and dissonance might almost be a necessity for a Welshman, writing in English, who is sensitive to the deep ironies.

He also seems deeply touched by the Celtic idea of a "thin place", where boundaries of time, past, present and future, dissolve combined with a profound sense of the missing or lost. He may not be the, caricatured by Shakespeare, "augury-mongering windbag", Owain Glyndŵr, but can still write:

All was foretold me: naught
Could I foresee ...

("The New House")

and in his most famous poem, "Adlestrop",

No-one left and no-one came
On the bare platform ...

is both descriptive and chilling. There is both loss and dread there: where are the passengers?

It is, of course, dangerous to ascribe a particular sensibility to a group and Edward Thomas himself resisted pigeonholing. In an era where cultural exchange is liable to misconstruction as cultural appropriation we might even be wary, even if, as I have argued, we should acknowledge a writer's hinterland. Alex Diggins concludes his review with a broad, generous and attractive definition of Welshness; I think Edward Thomas would have had no difficulty in claiming such a nationality.

■ **Leo Carr**
Rickmansworth, Herts

Despentes and Acker

Robert Buckeye is not impressed (Letters, August 7) with the comparison I make between Virginie Despentes and Kathy Acker at the end of my review of *Vernon Subutex 3* (July 10). He calls it "superficial and misleading".

The comparison was certainly superficial - I made no pretensions of depth with it. But I don't think it was misleading. Buckeye makes some careful distinctions, which may or may not hold true, but I was only really thinking of their writing style: shocking, in-her-face, fearless punk outspokenness.

In a video interview with Lauren Oyler for the website *Broadly*, in 2015, Despentes said that she was profoundly shocked and amazed when she first read Kathy Acker (*Blood and Guts in High School*, it seems). Two years after this inspiring first encounter Despentes wrote her first novel, *Baise-moi*. "It came straight out of Kathy Acker", she told Oyler.

I would have thought I was on much shakier ground with my comparison, in the same sentence, of Despentes with the Roman poet Horace. I take it, from his silence on the matter, that Robert Buckeye is fine with that.

■ **Hal Jensen**
London W1

'Volksdeutsche'

I write about the controversy concerning the term "Volksdeutsche", that was in Stanley Bill's article of May 29, because after so much ink has been spilt on the topic in letters, it would be nice to get it right. The latest correspondence (from Shaun Whiteside in Letters, July 17)

makes the point that *Volksdeutscher* is correct and *Volksdeutsche* is wrong. Yes and no.

Stanley Bill's original article referred to a man who "uses his linguistic skills to pass as a person of German ethnicity - a *Volksdeutsche*". Brigid Purcell and Shaun Whiteside say it should be in the masculine gender (a *Volksdeutscher*), with Whiteside quoting Nietzsche's "Ich bin Deutscher". Yes, a man saying he is of German ethnicity could say "Ich bin Deutscher", but Mr Bill was referencing an adjective that modified the noun "person", and since person is a feminine noun in German, *Volksdeutsche* is correct.

■ **Micah Bloomfield**
New York 10024

Nabokov's Pushkin

I was surprised to see in Stephanie Sandler's review of recent Pushkin translations in English (August 21 & 28) no mention of Vladimir Nabokov's surely definitive version of 1964, a work partly translated in her own university of Harvard. It is true that Nabokov's rendering does not rhyme, but he hoped he had written a text of "humble fidelity".

I personally find the text the most readable of all English versions. The Commentary Nabokov provides alongside the poem is probably the most detailed of any major text in any language. This critique includes essays by Nabokov on the structure of the stanza and of the poem overall, the poem's genesis, its publication history, Pushkin's own views on the work, a granular analysis of nearly every Russian phrase in the

poem, unfinished "fragments" from the poem, and a translation of the poem "Trud", or "The Work", where Pushkin tells us he is sorry to have to part from his finished work, his "night's silent companion, / Golden Aurora's friend, friend of the household gods". No one has been kinder, or more mindful, of those gods than Vladimir Nabokov, the most brilliant Russian to ever write in English.

■ **Sam Milne**
Claygate, Esher

Two-note

John Beckwith (Letters, August 21 & 28), objecting to your writer Laura Tunbridge's use of "couplet" in a musical context, claims that "The term has no application in music". To the contrary: the applications go back 318 years at least. In 1701 the French gambist Marin Marais included in his second book of *pièces de viole* a set of variations on the folia tune. He called them "Couplets de folies": each variation was a couplet. By 1876 Stainer & Barrett (cited in the *OED*) came to define the term as "Two equal notes inserted in a passage of triple rhythm and made to occupy the time of three".

■ **Robin Adams**
London SE26

Unforgotten Giles Gordon

J.C.'s NB item on Alain Robbe-Grillet, in his *Writers Who Are More Or Less Forgotten* series (August 21 & 28), was interesting; it was also opportune in its examples of British writers of the same period and tradition: Giles Gordon, Alan Burns, B. S. Johnson. John

son's work has been retrieved from oblivion by the republication of his "book in a box" *The Unfortunates* in 1999, followed by a clutch of novels in 2013 alongside Jonathan Coe's biography. Now, in what would have been his eightieth year, perhaps it's the turn of Giles Gordon.

Already, there has been a long and fascinating reappraisal of Gordon's work by Nicholas Royle in the *Brixton Review of Books*. Impelled by that essay, I tracked down a copy (signed, inscribed First, it so happens - since none of his work is currently in print) of Gordon's first story collection, *Pictures from an Exhibition*. Although I found the collection a little repetitive, I was struck by how fresh the individual stories were, despite being published fifty years ago (1970). I would be keen to read several at least of his novels.

It seems both sad and unfair that someone who contributed so much to literature, not only in his own experimental writing but also as an agent, editor, anthologist and mentor, should be so thoroughly expunged from collective memory. Time, maybe, for some publisher to step in and up and make available to new readers some at least of Gordon's oeuvre?

■ **David Rose**
Ashford, Middlesex

It's difficult to work out from the context in which Giles Gordon is mentioned, in J.C.'s NB item about Alain Robbe-Grillet, whether he might qualify as one of the *Writers Who Are More or Less Forgotten* or as one who is (or has been) merely unjustly overlooked. Whichever is the case, in the age of the Goldsmiths Prize, with unconventional narratives becoming more widely accepted, the time is right for Gordon's experimental fiction to be reissued and reassessed. In *Girl with Red Hair* (1974) he takes apart the crime novel and reassembles it, thrillingly, in a way that no one would have seen before. His three collections contain enough outstanding material to fill a volume of selected "fictions", as he called them, while some of his best stories appeared after the publication of his final collection; it's my intention, given the required permissions, to assemble a volume of *Uncollected Stories* for Confinco Publishing.

■ **Nicholas Royle**
Manchester

J.C. mentions Alain Robbe-Grillet's influence on British experimentalists such as B. S. Johnson. However J.C. seems to have more or less forgotten Christine Brooke-Rose. There is only one remedy.

■ **Jim Hanson**
Wallington, Surrey

CONTACT

1 London Bridge Street
London SE1 9GF
letters@the-tls.co.uk



Britain first

The official history of the United Kingdom, according to the Home Office

FRANK TRENTMANN

A QUESTION TO TEST your historical knowledge: “D-Day refers to what event in British history?” Of course you know, or at least you thought you did. The right answer is: “British invasion of Europe”. That is according to the official practice questions “approved by the Home Office” to help people prepare for their citizenship and settlement exam in the United Kingdom, the *Life in the UK Test*. As a recent new citizen who was born and brought up in Germany, I am very grateful for the heroic sacrifice of many British men and women in the Second World War. But why does the Home Office want us to forget the many Americans and Canadians who died alongside them on the beaches in what was a joint *Allied* invasion?

In the recent debate about the removal of statues of slave traders and imperialists, Boris Johnson tweeted “we cannot now try to edit or censor our past. We cannot pretend to have a different history”. Unfortunately, his own government does precisely that in *Life in the United Kingdom: A guide for new residents*, also known as the *Life in the UK* handbook. Published by the Home Office, this book “has been approved by ministers and has official status”, and anyone who takes a citizenship or settlement test has to read and remember it. It includes information about the justice system, geography and so forth; it also contains some less relevant bits such as the 1973 thriller *Don't Look Now*. The chapter entitled “A long and illustrious history”, however, is not only riddled with factual errors, but amounts to a distortion of the past that does violence to our basic understanding of history and raises fundamental questions for a liberal society.

In July, I helped co-ordinate an open letter from historians calling on the Home Office to review this official and mandatory text because of its misrepresentation of slavery and decolonization. Many colleagues responded and chipped in with their expert knowledge. By July 22, 181 historians – from bright young scholars to many of the most eminent historians writing today, and from diverse backgrounds – had added their names, and the letter was widely reported. The Historical Association – a professional body that is non-partisan, as is the group of signatories – provided the letter with a home on the web, with a short form that allows historians at any stage

of their career to add their name to the list. At the time of writing (August 5), there are now a total of 566 signatories supporting the call for a review of the official history.

In the letter, we drew attention to two statements in the official history as examples of the larger disregard for colonial people and imperial violence. The first is the assertion that slavery was “illegal” in Britain by the eighteenth century. In reality, Britons debated whether slavery was illegal or not, and enslaved people were openly advertised for sale in British newspapers, as can be seen on the academic website created by the team led by Simon Newman at the University of Glasgow: www.runaways.gla.ac.uk/for_sale. The second concerned decolonization. The British Empire was a conglomerate of different types of rule, and decolonization consequently took a different course in different regions, sometimes peaceful, at other times not. *Life in the UK* states: “there was, for the most part, an orderly transition from Empire to Commonwealth, with countries being granted their independence”. There is no mention of the chaos, deaths and violence in the Partition of India in 1947, the Mau-Mau Rebellion in Kenya (1952–60), or various other so-called “emergencies”, from Malaya (1948–60) to Aden (1963–7).

I have done what all historians learn to do in their training. I have collected sources (the original 2004 handbook, the second edition published in 2007, and various official practice tests), placed the current version alongside them and subjected these official texts to a critical source analysis. What comes out is disturbing. Three instances illustrate the types of interference with historical truth at work: the cutting out of the deaths of enslaved people during the Middle Passage and the altered portrayal of the slave trade; the deletion of Munich 1938 and Appeasement; and the presentation of Adolf Hitler and the Second World War.

Britain transported 3.2 million enslaved people in total, of whom 12.5 per cent died on board British ships and another 20–25 per cent in the first three years after arriving in the Caribbean. In 2004 and 2007, the official histories acknowledged that many enslaved people died during the Middle Passage, although the original number given was a significant underestimate. In the current text, the dead have been deleted altogether. Instead, slaves are now merely “travelling on British ships in horrible condi-

“Slave Ship (Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying, Typhoon Coming On)”
by J. M. W. Turner,
1840

tions”. The slave trade is no longer “evil” but “booming”. In 2007, the text acknowledged that “Liverpool and Bristol, gained great prosperity” from the slave trade. Today, this sentence is gone, too. Instead, we are told that slavery was an “overseas industry”, as if British society was not affected by it; the only reference to “British ports” appears a page later in the context of the abolition of the slave trade in 1807. The “free Africans and escaped slaves” who previously made an appearance in eighteenth-century Britain were left nameless, but at least the handbook acknowledged their existence, and that “some of them wrote books about their experiences”. Now they are also shown the door. All this cutting out flies in the face of what historians have documented for some time about the entanglement of the slave trade with British society, in, for example, the work of the Centre for the Study of the Legacies of British Slave-ownership at UCL, www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs.

The second example concerns the origins of the Second World War. Readers of the *TLS* will be familiar with Appeasement, the Munich Crisis and Neville Chamberlain’s failed strategy to contain Adolf Hitler’s aggressive designs. Winston Churchill was among the few vocal and persistent critics. Whatever historians have argued about, everyone is agreed that Appeasement did happen and is an essential part of the story. Appeasement did feature in the old handbooks. The present version cuts it out and replaces it with “the British government tried to avoid another war”, and then jumps straight to Hitler’s invasion of Poland. This makes a mess of the origins of the Second World War, and readers now only learn two paragraphs later, after the invasion of Poland, that Czechoslovakia had been invaded, too, at some unspecified date and that Austria was “occupied” (“annexed” is the term normally used). Since Appeasement is no longer mentioned it also means Churchill can no longer take any credit for opposing it. After he is introduced as a Conservative MP in 1900 we move straight to May 1940 when he became prime minister. Regardless what you think should happen to statues of Rhodes and other jingoists, this should raise eyebrows among conservatives as well as liberals and radicals.

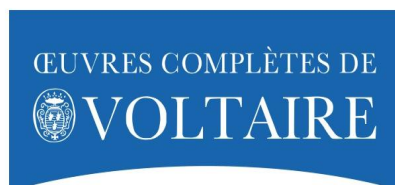
A final example concerns the Nazis. Earlier editions informed migrants of Hitler’s “racist ideology”. Now, the reference to racism is cut, too. Instead, we are told that Hitler “believed that the conditions imposed on Germany by the Allies after the First World War were unfair; he also wanted to conquer more land for the German people”. That’s it. No antisemitism, no murder of the Jews, the Roma and Sinti, or the disabled. The Soviet Union is allowed a short walk-on part in a “fierce conflict, with huge losses on both sides”, but you would be hard pressed to know from this characterization of the war that the Germans also murdered millions of civilians and prisoners of war in the East. Of course, Hitler (like most Germans) thought Versailles was unjust, and he also wanted to conquer *Lebensraum* for the German people. But this required forcibly deporting and murdering other peoples to make room. The two elements of Hitler’s beliefs that have been added, while in themselves correct, acquire a different meaning when “racist ideology” is eliminated and antisemitism is not mentioned. This passage would be a deeply troubling statement coming from anyone, but in an official history that is required reading for new citizens, it is unacceptable.

Since David Cameron in 2016, prime ministers have supported a memorial to the victims of the Holocaust. Yet, neither in the history chapter, nor anywhere in this 180-page-long book does the word Holocaust appear once. Of course, it was the Germans who were responsible for the Holocaust, not the British. Still, in an official text which explicitly aims to promote tolerance and which the Home Office defends for providing new residents with “historical references which occur in daily conversation”, this omission is rather worrying, particularly at a time of growing concern about racism and antisemitism. Applicants are asked to remember

Frank Trentmann is Professor of History at Birkbeck, University of London. His books include Free Trade Nation, 2008, and Empire of Things, 2016. He is working on a moral history of the Germans

several hundred individuals and numerous battles. Is it really more critical for life in the UK today to know about Dame Mary Peters and the Battle of Marston Moor than of the Holocaust?

Where does this strange official view of history come from and where is it taking us? The current, third edition was released in 2013 and, with small changes, remains the mandatory handbook for migrants today. The precise authorship of the new version is difficult to determine, in part because the text does not have a single author to begin with.



'It would be difficult to overstate the scholarly value of the "Œuvres complètes de Voltaire" [...] an unrivalled and indispensable resource for scholars working in the field of eighteenth-century studies'

James Fowler

Lettres sur les Anglais Critical edition by Nicholas Cronk

Drawing on the experiences of his stay in England in the 1720s, Voltaire's *Lettres sur les Anglais* – also known as the *Lettres philosophiques* – is a key work of the European eighteenth century, a manifesto of modern thinking that helped the Enlightenment to define itself.

This edition is the most complete ever produced. It includes the original English version, the *Letters concerning the English nation*, as well as an edition and critical study of the clandestine *Lettre sur M. Locke* in which Voltaire's materialist thinking received its fullest expression.

3 vols, ISBN 978-0-7294-1234-6
tinyurl.com/y4vzlurd

APPROACHING COMPLETION...

Œuvres complètes de Voltaire 203 volumes (1968-2021)

ISBN 978-0-7294-1236-0

'This critical edition of Voltaire's collected works has changed the landscape of eighteenth-century scholarship.'

Sanja Perovic

www.voltaire.ox.ac.uk



Most of the current history chapter has been lifted word for word from its two predecessors, the original *Life in the UK* handbook, introduced by the Labour government in 2004 and slightly revised in 2007. Bernard Crick, the political theorist and Labour adviser who, in 1998, had made citizenship an integral part of the National Curriculum, was a lead author for the original chapter. There are good reasons for later editions building on earlier ones, but this large overlap in text and information makes the deliberate cuts and rephrasing stand out the more. The earlier official histories under Labour certainly also had problems. They still treated King Arthur, for example, as a historical personage. They also presented Labour as united in support of decolonization, glossing over its own divides on empire. But errors sixteen years ago can hardly excuse new errors and distortions today.

The history pages in the previous editions, moreover, were purely for background information: history was not tested. Since 2013, the history chapter has been required reading because it is now tested. And for all its biases, the Labour versions in the opening paragraph did tell readers that "any account of history ... is only one interpretation. Historians often disagree ...". In the chapter itself, there were several places where contemporary disagreements were noted, including about the costs and benefits of imperialism. In the current version, there is no room for diverse interpretations. We are told, for example, that unspecified "others thought that the Empire had become over-expanded", but then are confidently assured that "the great majority of British people believed in the Empire as a force for good in the world". Finally, some errors and distortions are more serious and dangerous than others. To get King Arthur wrong is one thing; to get Adolf Hitler wrong quite another.

There are plenty of places in the current edition where I cringe as a professional historian. The Glorious Revolution, the Industrial Revolution, and the American Revolution, all contain basic errors. Many colleagues have pointed out mistakes on everything from the Bill of Rights to social reform. But these errors are not what is at stake in the dispute. More fundamentally, the history in *Life in the UK* suggests that Britain – or at least, the official mind – has a serious problem with race. The softening of the slave trade is, after all, complemented by a sanitizing of Hitler. The rewriting, moreover, radiates out across British history more widely, resulting in an extreme version of insular nationalism. Some of it is so blatant that it is almost childish, but other instances are more serious. At the end of the Hundred Years War, for example, the English are no longer kicked out by the French, but simply "left France", as if they got bored with the local cuisine. Britain always needs to appear reasonable and victorious. Force disappears from the record, not just with regard to the slave trade but also in Ireland and elsewhere. The colonization of Ulster by James I in the early seventeenth century, in which local Gaelic and Catholic groups had their lands confiscated or dispossessed and given to English and Scottish Protestant settlers, no longer involved "force". Now the government simply "encouraged" the so-called Plantations. In the Troubles, the British army is airbrushed out, with the result that dead British soldiers cannot be mentioned any longer either. Given that the troubled colonial past continues to cast a shadow over the present, this chapter serves up a poor civics lesson.

The American patriots do appear in *Life in the UK*. The earlier versions stated that "Parliament refused to compromise" with the rebels who demanded "no taxation without representation". The current version reads: "Parliament tried to compromise by repealing some of the taxes, but relations between the British government and the colonies continued to worsen". True, in 1766 the Stamp Act was repealed, but the same day the Declaratory Act was passed, through which Parliament made it crystal clear to the American colonists that it reserved the right to make laws "in all cases whatsoever". The

Declaration of Independence and its welcome by "many people in Britain and Europe" has also gone. The reference to a milestone in the history of human rights was cut at the same time as Theresa May, as Home Secretary, was seeking to scrap the Human Rights Act.

In the same year it launched its new official history, the Home Office also introduced the so-called hostile environment for illegal immigration, to which many of the Windrush generation, some of whom had lived and worked in the country lawfully for over fifty years, fell victim. The new chapter on the national past can be seen as a historical cousin of the "hostile environment", eliminating the voices of migrants, enslaved people and colonial subjects from the annals of history. As the historians' letter points out, in a list of over 200 individuals applicants have to learn, the "only individual of colonial origin named in the book is Sake Dean Mohamet, who co-founded England's first curry house in 1810". In the very long list of names from Julius Caesar to Boris Johnson, the only other non-whites to appear are sports people and the architect Zaha Hadid.

Since the official history harks back to 2013 one can also read it as a vision of Brexit Britain avant la lettre. Ties with Continental Europe are already cut in the text, three years before Brexit was decided. The cuts range from petty to significant. The Black Death used to be "one of the worst disasters to ever strike Britain and Europe" (2007). Now it becomes a localized outbreak: "one of the worst disasters ever to strike Britain". In more recent times, Britain's important links to the rest of Europe and the world are cut, too. A section with a list of inventions that "Britain has given to the world" includes insulin, DNA, MRI and the World Wide Web. All of these involved international partners and laboratories. Tim Berners-Lee was indeed born in London, but the web was born at Cern, in Geneva. Perhaps only in Britain today do people learn about Francis Crick, without James Watson. In this official history, Britain always gives, never takes. The Britain in these pages is so boosterish and glorious that Great Britain ends up looking like little Britain, insecure and always shouting for attention.

In a debate organized by the *Spectator* last month, I discussed the official history chapter, its failures and its purpose, with Stephen Parkinson, one of Theresa May's special advisers when she was the home secretary responsible for the new edition of the booklet, and a leading figure in the Vote Leave campaign. He graciously conceded that the current chapter is wrong to say slavery was "illegal" within the British Isles, but otherwise rallied to the defence of the official history. His view was that it will never be possible to get everything right, and that the handbook is written for a popular audience, not for specialists. I agree, but you do not need a PhD to know that Hitler was antisemitic or that people died in the Middle Passage. The earlier statement that the slave trade was "evil" is no more complicated than the now preferred term "booming". Of course, history is complex – and the Holocaust certainly is. But that does not mean we cannot communicate it in a sensible manner. Lecturers, like schoolteachers and colleagues in museums, public education and elsewhere, do it all the time. They have learnt how to simplify complex information when introducing pupils and citizens to historical topics. GCSE history includes the knowledge that Hitler held racist beliefs. Why should an official history for migrants not do the same?

The second issue in the debate concerns societies' capacity to confront the darker chapters of their national past. Here Parkinson drew a sharp contrast between old countries like Britain and the Federal Republic of Germany which, he said, was "quite literally, a different country" from the Third Reich, and so had it easier to come to terms with the skeletons in its closet. Contrary to Parkinson's suggestion, however, those Germans who took on responsibility for past injustices did so precisely because

“
At the end of
the Hundred
Years War, the
English are no
longer kicked
out by the
French, but
simply 'left
France', as if
they got bored
with the local
cuisine

they insisted on a continuity with the national past. Some might think of the Federal Republic as a completely different country, but in 1949 its constitution (the Basic Law or *Grundgesetz*) made it clear that the Federal Republic was a continuation of the German Reich, and it continues to be so to this day. The continuous legal identity matters, because Konrad Adenauer strongly felt that West Germany had a moral obligation not only to take on prewar debts but to pay reparations to many victims of the Nazis, although, of course, more should have been done. In fact, it was East Germany, which thought of itself as the product of immaculate conception, that refused to pay any reparations to Jewish victims – partly, because the crimes had been committed by the Nazis, partly because it would have meant giving money back to the “class enemy”.

For the British debate about what can (or cannot) be said in an official history, the fact that Britain has a long history should be no obstacle. Within Britain itself, empire has always had its critics, from John Wilkes (who supported the Americans) to Mary Kingsley (who challenged prejudices in her travels in West Africa). Many held ambivalent views about empire, including Kingsley herself. If contemporaries had heated discussions about the pros and cons of empire, why assume that Britons today are incapable of doing the same? If Kingsley was able to treat Boer prisoners of war and die in the process in 1900, should the current Home Office history not be able to say 120 years later a little more than just that Boers died from “disease”, without acknowledging that tens of thousands died in British concentration camps, including women and children? Talking about past injustice is not automatically unpatriotic.

In fact, you could see it as the patriotic and decent thing to do.

Ultimately, the story of the rewriting of official history reflects badly on almost everyone. The text has been in the public domain since 2013. There has been public debate about the sheer number of facts, names and events migrants are expected to read and remember. The odd quote or fact has been corrected. Yet, in none of these discussions has the broader misrepresentation of empire, race and history attracted any serious attention. Do ministers and civil servants not read the text they expect over a hundred thousand applicants for citizenship and settlement to study every year? But the historical profession – and I include myself in this criticism – does not come out well either. Why have we historians collectively not spoken out sooner against this misleading and, in parts, offensive caricature of history? In *History Today* last year, Joanne Paul, an early modernist, gave an insightful account of her own depressing experience with the test; even that, however, was more than six years after it had been imposed on migrants, and, as far as I am aware, prompted no response from the Home Office.

Many colleagues have spoken out in the debate about the National Curriculum, and some did voice their concern when the original citizenship book was introduced in 2004; at that time, though, the history pages were not mandatory and not tested. Nations and governments have for a long time been involved in the “invention of tradition”, as my late colleague Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger called it. The citizenship test and the current history, however, are not a memorial or a national pageant, in which participation is voluntary. It is also

The original letter and list of signatories can be viewed at <https://historyjournal.org.uk/2020/07/21/historians-call-for-a-review-of-home-office-citizenship-and-settlement-test>

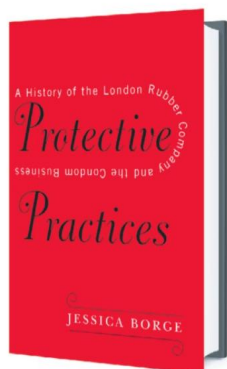
unlike a school text, which can be discussed in class and where students and teachers can weigh evidence and argue with each other.

I took the citizenship test two and a half years ago. After a quick glance at the history chapter I decided instead to use my time to learn how old the Giant's Causeway is and who John Petts was. From his description in the book, he appeared to have been an obscure Welsh engraver, and I was annoyed at having to learn yet another trivial name. But even here, I found out later, patriotism is whitewashed, and the handbook fails to mention the remarkable achievement for which he should be officially remembered. In 1963, Petts raised funds from thousands of Welsh people to create a stained-glass window featuring a Black Jesus for the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, in memory of the four African American girls murdered there by the Ku Klux Klan. Unfortunately, that sort of thing you learn on Wikipedia, not in the official history.

This is not a case of a few historians quibbling about a date here or there or nuances in interpretation. History is “not by fact alone”, but without getting the basic facts right it is nothing at all. I would like to take the prime minister at his word when he said that we must not edit or censor our past. We can have a debate about which statues should stay up or come down, and also which new statues should be commissioned for people who have been written out of the national history. But when it comes to the distortion of history in an important official text, there can, I believe, only be agreement that such a text needs to be withdrawn pending review. ■



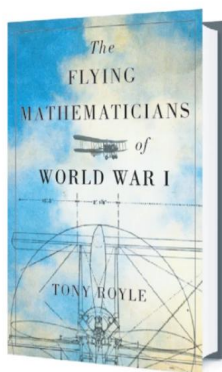
New from MQUP



Protective Practices *A History of the London Rubber Company and the Condom Business*

JESSICA BORGE
With a foreword by Lesley Hall
Paper £22.50 306pp

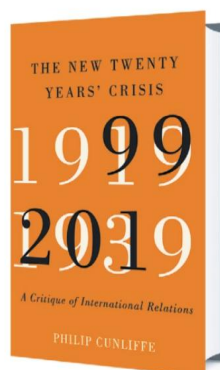
“*Protective Practices* is a must-read for anyone interested in the intertwined histories of contraception, technology, and the personal product business ... Borge provides original and critical insight into the behind-the-scenes work of manufacturing, marketing, and selling contraceptives from their association with illicit sex in the 1910s to their rebranding as a standard health product in the 1980s and 1990s.” –Donna J. Drucker, author of *Contraception: A Concise History*



The Flying Mathematicians of World War I

TONY ROYLE
Paper £22.50 288pp

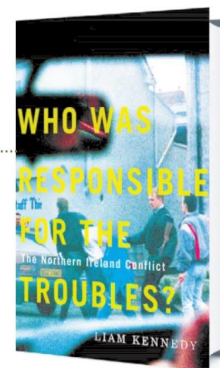
“The bravery of these scientists who took to the air to help the war effort is quite remarkable. Untrained as pilots, some paid the ultimate price as they raced against the clock. Royle’s viewpoint as a modern airline captain gives a unique insight to the challenges they faced and the game-changing advances they made.” –Jonathan Agnew, BBC cricket commentator and amateur aviator



The New Twenty Years' Crisis *A Critique of International Relations, 1999–2019*

PHILIP CUNLIFFE
Paper £19.95 168pp

“In this bold, no-holds-barred polemic, the author not only puts the liberal order to the sword but the contemporary discipline of international relations, too. Deploying Carr in ways that are both imaginative and ingenious, Philip Cunliffe demonstrates why the great English scourge of inter-war liberalism still speaks to us with such force today. A challenging tour de force.” –Michael Cox, London School of Economics



Who Was Responsible for the Troubles? *The Northern Ireland Conflict*

LIAM KENNEDY
Paper £19.95 256pp

“A provocative, original, and courageous book. Anybody interested in the Northern Ireland Troubles, or in the complex legacies of terrorist violence, should read it.” –Richard English, author of *Does Terrorism Work? A History*

**McGILL
QUEEN'S
UNIVERSITY
PRESS**

mqup.ca @McGillQueensUP

Lenin in the library

The role of the British Museum in the Russian Revolution

LESLEY CHAMBERLAIN

THE SPARK THAT LIT THE REVOLUTION

Lenin in London and the politics that changed the world

ROBERT HENDERSON

288pp. I. B. Tauris. £25.

A CENTURY AFTER THE Bolshevik Revolution, we continue to learn new facts about the man who made it happen. Vladimir Lenin hugely admired the British Museum's Round Reading Room and spent much of his five visits to London – in 1902-03, 1905, 1907, 1908 and 1911 – researching history, philosophy, economics and whatever took his fancy. An intellectual and a dedicated archivist, he lodged nearby in Regent Place, Percy Circus and Tavistock Square, for convenience and to save on transport. Robert Henderson, himself for many years an archivist at the now British Library, has turned up his successive requests for a library pass, in a neat hand and stilted English, now as Dr Jacob Richter, one of his hundred or so aliases, and now in his true name, Oulianoff, which, transcribed in the French manner, has sometimes evaded previous researchers. In all the London stays, the name “Lenin”, possibly inspired by the river Lena when he was exiled in Siberia, surfaced only once. Lenin,

and “Lenin”, belonged to the future, though the man himself was already recognized by fellow émigrés as dedicated and uncompromising, capable of “underhand polemical tricks and intolerance”.

It's a nice thought that, had Britain got the rest of its institutions right, then Lenin might have conceded that this greatest of the imperialist powers, with its raging capitalist economy and its open-door policy towards political refugees, was an exemplary country:

When I am in London I always work at the library here. It is a remarkable institution: we could learn a lot from them, especially from their exceptional reference section. Ask them any question and in the shortest space of time they'll tell you which books to consult ... And, moreover how pleasant and comfortable it is to work there ... Yes, the British bourgeoisie doesn't spare any money where this institution is concerned, and that's as it should be ... Their holdings in economics are particularly good. The British are merchants after all: they need to trade with Russia and so need to know all about her ...

These sentiments, recorded by N. S. Karzhansky in a memoir first published in the Soviet Union in 1956, belong to Lenin's moment of greatest triumph in London, when his Bolshevik faction defeated the Mensheviks at the Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party in 1907. Karzhansky was a young delegate who managed seventy to eighty words of shorthand a minute. Lenin, whose library interests also included the history of stenography, pounced on the man he needed to record his Congress contributions for posterity.

Lenin didn't make much of London as such. Unlike Marx, there were no family picnics to Hampstead Heath. Nor, unlike Marx and Engels, was the future Soviet leader learning from the condition of the English working man. Back and forth from Geneva, St Petersburg and Finland, Lenin was a prominent figure on the “Little Russian Island” of like-minded political exiles in late tsarist times. He stuck to his own, and he worked and worked.



Lesley Chamberlain has been writing about Russia for forty years. Her most recent book is *Ministry of Darkness: How Sergei Uvarov created conservative modern Russia, 2019*

In fact, the Russian island was more of an archipelago, with Lenin and his colleagues in WC1 and its more proletarian base in Whitechapel. There, in the East End, and in an older Populist spirit, one Alexei Teplov created a Free Russian Library where working men could read the press, and where public lectures were held on socialist topics. It was Teplov, a rare charming figure in this tale, who eventually found Lenin unethical.

Henderson has woven his narrative out of a brilliant miscellany of archival sources, with crucial finds in the Hoover Institution's records of the Okhrana, or political police. Surveillance of London's little Russia was organized from the Paris embassy in rue de Grenelle, leading to the atmosphere of bungling and menace that we know from Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent*. British policemen, retired and not, contributed their services. In response, the political – experts in false names and papers – led a life of *konspiratsiya*. They came to recognize the spies in their pursuit and tried in vain to get them arrested.

Lenin is not really this book's main player. But the title *Lenin in London* is good enough as the evocation of a phenomenon. Moreover, it tells the story of what may have been Lenin's first love affair, before his marriage to Nadezhda Krupskaya, and long before his passionate involvement with Inessa Armand. Apollinaria Yakubova was a beautiful and dedicated revolutionary activist in St Petersburg, and a friend of Lenin's sister Olga. Lenin adoringly called her Lirochka. But perhaps already disliking his desire for absolute control of the Party, she married another activist, Konstantin Takhtarev, who shared her choice of a more democratic structure. The Takhtarevs moved to London, later followed by the Lenin/Ulyanovs, and the two couples spent much time together before falling out over what became the Bolshevik-Menshevik split. We knew almost nothing about Yakubova before now because she and her Menshevik husband were later airbrushed from history. ■

Grateful to Gorbachev

Personal chemistry and the fall of Soviet communism

RICHARD VINEN

THE HUMAN FACTOR

Gorbachev, Reagan and the end of the Cold War

ARCHIE BROWN

512pp. Oxford University Press. £25.

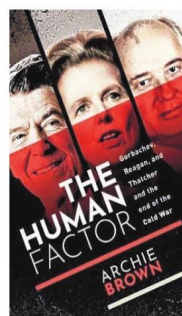
GIVEN THE FREQUENCY with which he is favourably compared to the present incumbent of the White House, it is worth recalling what his contemporaries thought of Ronald Reagan. Mikhail Gorbachev told the Politburo that they were dealing with a “caveman”. Margaret Thatcher turned to her Foreign Secretary after a meeting in the White House and said, tapping her head, “there is nothing there”. George Shultz, the US Secretary of State from 1982 to 1989, told Reagan, after a summit with the Soviet Union: “You cannot just sit there telling jokes”. The astonishing thing, though, is that, on the central issue of his time, Reagan was right and almost all his numerous moral and intellectual superiors were wrong. In 1983, he said that communism was a “sad bizarre chapter in human history whose last pages are even now being written”. Compare this prescience with a British ambassador who remarked in February 1985: “There's one thing we all know, the Soviet Union isn't going to change”.

Gorbachev and Thatcher were closer to the ambassador than the president. In their different ways, they both hoped for change in the Eastern bloc, which

was why Gorbachev was so interested in the political reforms of the Prague Spring in 1968 and Thatcher so interested in the economic reforms of János Kádár's Hungary in the 1980s. But, until very late, neither seems seriously to have anticipated that communist regimes across Europe and in Russia itself would disappear in their lifetimes.

The fall of communist rule in Europe was partly to do with the ever more painfully obvious technological and economic superiority of the United States over the Soviet Union. However, these seismic shifts did not, in themselves, bring down communism. Under a different leader, the USSR might have limped on by repressing dissent and whipping its satellite states into line. It might also have lurched into the desperate gamble of a pre-emptive war. The world has good reason to feel grateful to Gorbachev for ruling these options out – though such gratitude is rarely expressed in the West and, so far as one can tell, rarely felt in Putin's Russia.

Even Gorbachev's admirers, however, may raise an eyebrow at the extent to which Archie Brown, in *The Human Factor*, makes him the hero of world politics in the late 1980s. Gorbachev was a humane and intelligent man, and he may well have come to believe in democracy towards the end of his time in office. But belief in democracy is easy for leaders until they are forced to practise it. Because he was deposed in 1991, we do not know much about how Gorbachev would have adjusted to a world in which he no longer enjoyed the extraordinary powers that he had had as General Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party. One should also note that the Soviet



Richard Vinen teaches history at King's College London

authorities under Gorbachev could still be brutal. Brown quotes Oleg Gordievsky – the British spy in the KGB – a couple of times, but he does not say anything about the grisly fate that would have awaited Gordievsky if his MI6 handlers had not managed to extract him from Moscow after his exposure in July 1985.

Brown has a lower regard for Reagan and Thatcher but recognizes that, in an odd way, Gorbachev was lucky in his Western interlocutors. Reagan's world view – rooted in science fiction, B movie fantasy and, apparently, a literal belief in biblical Armageddon – made him receptive to the prospect of dramatic change in ways that a more subtle politician might not have been. Both he and Thatcher benefited from their reputations as fierce anti-communists, which made them less vulnerable to attacks from right-wingers when they negotiated with the USSR. The West's relations with the Soviet Union were also eased in the late 1980s by the rise of younger, more open-minded officials. The cheerful irreverence of Rodric Braithwaite – Britain's last ambassador to the Soviet Union – must have come as a nice surprise to Russians who were used to dealing with the standard-issue products of the Foreign Office nomenklatura.

In his youth, Gorbachev apparently sought to learn about the West by reading a translation of C. P. Snow's *Corridors of Power*. I am not sure whether he will recognize Snow's view of politics in Brown's analysis, but he might find the style rather Snowvian – ponderous sentences groan under the weight of their clichés. One can see why Thatcher was attracted to those advisers who expressed themselves in more vivid terms – though Robert Conquest, one of those advisers, claimed the suggestion that he should republish a book of his on the Soviet Union with the subtitle “I told you so, you fucking fools” had come from Kingsley Amis rather than himself. ■

Silvered wings

Myths and muddling through in Britain's air war

MARK BURMAN

THE BURIED SPITFIRES OF BURMA

A 'fake' history

ANDY BROCKMAN AND TRACY SPAIGHT

336pp. History Press. £20.

SECRET SPITFIRES

Britain's hidden civilian army

ETHEM CETINTAS AND KARL HOWMAN

192pp. History Press. £20.

TO DEFEAT THE FEW

The Luftwaffe's campaign to destroy RAF Fighter Command August–September 1940

DOUGLAS C. DILDY AND PAUL CRICKMORE

384pp. Osprey. £30.

LANCASTER

The forging of a very British legend

JOHN NICHOL

464pp. Simon and Schuster. £20.

EVER SINCE 1940, the mere silhouette of an elliptical winged Supermarine Spitfire has been enough to summon up potent symbolism of Britain standing alone. In the deep night of a very different battle, the rugged Avro Lancaster carried the collective will and sacrifice of the warfare state, along with high incendiary, on nightly city raids. These aircraft were designed and flown when there was a passion for wings, a triumphant fusion of speed, design and modernity powered by the cult of the aviator and the innovative designers who put them aloft. In the film *First of the Few* (1942), David Niven slides back the canopy of his fighter and calls out to the spirit of designer R. J. Mitchell "they can't take the Spitfires Mitch. They can't take 'em", before piloting his squadron into celestial clouds accompanied by William Walton's newly minted *Spitfire Prelude and Fugue*.

The Spitfire is glued in the collective British imagination and retelling of 1940. History's first ever purely aerial campaign offered a kind of cauterized conflict – seemingly shorn of the worst excesses of total war. The Few are forever weaving contrails in the burning blue over Kentish hop fields, like hi-tech bowmen of Agincourt. What you might call the Spitfire delusion is central to one of four new books linking these symbolic aircraft to history and culture. Andy Brockman and Tracy Spaight's *The Buried Spitfires of Burma* weaves fact and fictions around an obsessional quest for crates of buried Spitfires on an airfield in Mingdalon, now in Myanmar.

For David Cundall, a Lincolnshire farmer, air wreck recoverer and frustrated flyer, unearthing "the planes that saved us in the Battle of Britain" is both a matter of national pride and a unique opportunity to obtain a fabled treasure hoard worth hundreds of millions in the Warbirds market. According to Cundall and others, a consignment of Spitfire Mark XIVs was buried at the end of the war on Mountbatten's orders to aid native tribesmen and British allies, the Karen, for a future insurgency. In 2012, the prime minister David Cameron backed a joint heritage project between the UK and Myanmar to "uncover, restore and display these fighter planes in the skies of Britain once again". The lure of squadrons of Spitfires flying down the Mall and into the pages of the *Mail* was hard to resist. What could possibly go wrong?

The story told by Brockman, a conflict archaeologist, and Spaight, whose gaming firm backed Cundall's venture, demonstrates the warping power of delusional belief in a by now near mythic aeroplane



buried underground. The authors play with the illogic of such a plan through supposed extracts from the spurious fiction, "The Spitfires of Rangoon: A novel of the Secret War of Burma". Meanwhile in the real Myanmar the game is afoot. A maddening dig is held in a land ruled by the Generals, riddled with bewildering bureaucracy and a military not best pleased at a JCB gouging chunks out of a working airfield. It becomes horribly apparent to Brockman and Spaight that they could dig for ever and find only rotten timbers and blue clay. In fact Cundall already had dug, often in the same spots; he just failed to share that information with his backers or believe the evidence of his own eyes.

During the war, thousands of real Spitfires were constructed by a covert army, away from prying eyes, a story told by Ethem Cetintas and Karl Howman in *Secret Spitfires*. Luftwaffe air raids hit Southampton and Supermarine's factories in the late summer of the Battle of Britain. With production critical, workers were ordered to remain at their posts until the last possible moment. On September 26, as a riveter, Dinks Diaper recalled, "the blue patch of sky was full of ... sixty bombers. There was hardly any time between when the air raid siren started and the bombs started falling". That raid wounded and haunted Supermarine's works manager Hartley Blyth Pratt, eventually leading to his suicide, but not before he devised a plan for a network of small, concealed aircraft factories across Southampton. Lord Beaverbrook, the Minister for Aircraft Production, then demanded the abandonment of the main factories and a radically enlarged dispersal in a 50-mile radius of Southampton: warehouses, laundries, car dealerships, bus depots, garages, even a spare bedroom. Because the Spitfire could be produced in sub assemblies, anywhere with a concrete floor, big enough doors and an available power supply would do.

The first Spitfire Mk 1A was delivered six months after Supermarine had been bombed out. More than 12,000 would follow. In this account the state-of-the-art fighting machine truly becomes the people's plane, the military industrial complex as cottage industry. "Industrial innocents", mainly local women, were recruited with no experience of riveting, welding and wiring. Women ferry pilots like Joy Lofthouse would deliver the finished aircraft sans wireless: "You practically breathed on the controls and it did what you wanted. It was the nearest thing to having wings".

For all the Spitfire funds and enduring public ado-

Poster for *Spitfire*, 1942, the US title for the film *First of the Few*

ration it was the more rugged Hawker Hurricane that made up almost two thirds of Fighter Command's strength in 1940, accounting for a similar percentage of Luftwaffe planes. How the Luftwaffe lost the world's first independent air conflict is detailed in Douglas Dildy and Paul Crickmore's weighty study *To Defeat the Few*. Goering's Luftwaffe, integrated as part of Hitler's Blitzkrieg, had been terrifyingly successful against ill-matched European airforces. Yet it lacked a heavy bomber of any worth and soon failed in destroying the retreating Allied forces at Dunkirk. In the Battle of Britain, the Luftwaffe's objectives could only be measured successful if they drove the RAF from its bases in southern England to allow for an invasion to go ahead.

The attack was made against the world's first integrated air defence system, one born in the crisis of rearmament. For economic and strategic reasons the orthodoxy that the "bomber will always get through" was overturned. "The role of our airforce is ... to prevent the Germans' knocking us out", declared Sir Thomas Inskip, Minister for the Co-ordination of Defence, in late 1937. Such an idea was attractive to Fighter Command's Commander-in-Chief, Hugh Dowding. Build cheaper, modern, 8-gun monoplanes wedded to a system of listening posts, anti-aircraft artillery, observer corps and primitive radar – all feeding into a communications network commanded from Fighter Command. The Dowding system anticipated the conflict to come. Not so the RAF's outdated and unwieldy close formation fighting tactics, ill suited to the reality of high-speed air combat.

Air Marshal Hermann Goering was also still fighting the last war, having little grasp of offensive air operations. He overruled "ridiculous" plans for

The Ideal Diplomat?
Women and Irish foreign affairs, 1946–90
Ann Marie O'Brien
Compelling stories of the pioneering women in the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs examining the appointment and experiences of Ireland's trailblazing female diplomats.
176pp. Hbk £40.00
ISBN 978-1-84682-851-5

Gaelic Ulster in the Middle Ages
History, Culture and Society
Katharine Simms
A detailed narrative of Ulster history from the eleventh to the early sixteenth century, relating the politics and culture of the province and the developments in the rest of Ireland and Europe.
568pp. colour illus. Hbk £55.00
ISBN 978-1-84682-793-8

Art O'Brien & Irish Nationalism in London, 1900–25
Mary MacDiarmada
Through rigorous research in British and Irish archives, this book recounts the vital contribution O'Brien made to the prosecution of the Irish revolution and reveals the story of Irish cultural, political and militant nationalism in London between 1900 and 1925.
224pp. illus. Hbk £50.00

Mark Burman is a documentary radio producer

+353 1 453 4668 • www.fourcourtspress.ie
Order online and receive a 10% discount

extensive night bombing of airfields and aircraft production, envisaging a two-week daylight campaign of attritional air fighting. Such a strategy was doomed to failure by poor intelligence about Fighter Command's strength, exaggerated claims of kills (both sides were guilty of this), and a mishmash of objectives. Even so, by early August Stuka attacks had effectively closed the Channel and soon RAF bases were being blitzed. Kenley's Sector Operations retreated to an abandoned village butcher's shop. Dowding even considered withdrawing his thin blue line from the Southeast. Yet Goering fatally changed tactics to large-scale attacks on London, saying "we have no chance of destroying English fighters on the ground, we must force their last reserves into combat in the air". In an attritional contest from the German perspective the maths were never on their side. They may have enjoyed a slight superiority in fighter vs fighter combat in the battle's most intense phase - three Spitfires and Hurricanes downed for every two ME 109s - but couldn't match the British production capacity that was delivering three times as many fighter planes. New RAF tactics brought large formations of fighters to bear with hideous losses for German crews.

On a single night, Bomber Command lost more aircrew than all the Spitfire and Hurricane pilots killed in the Battle of Britain. John Nichol's *Lancaster: The forging of a very British legend* is a biography of the bomber and the lives caught up in it. The prose never sings ("a course that would lead them to the dark heart of Nazi Germany"), but sheer weight of testimony becomes compelling. The Lancaster began life as the Avro Manchester. It was rushed into service in 1940 but its good flying characteristics were

undone by underpowered and constantly failing Rolls Royce Vultures engines. By the time of its withdrawal in 1942, 40 per cent had been lost on operations and another 25 per cent had crashed. But the two Roys, designer Chadwick and managing director Dobson, persisted with a redesign built around the proven Rolls Royce Merlins already powering the Spitfire. Doubling their number and increasing the wingspan, they reformed their failed design into an excellent instrument of destruction that could range further, higher and carry larger bomb loads than any of its counterparts. The Lancaster cost four times as much as the Spitfire to build but was relatively simple to construct.

What rolled off the assembly line was much admired by crews and ground staff and fitted perfectly into the plans of Bomber Command's new Commander-in-Chief, Arthur Harris. When, in May 1940, Churchill had signed off on unrestrained warfare for the RAF, Bomber Command was an embryo goliath. But Harris was determined to strike at Germany, destroying material and morale and putting "new heart into the British public". He ordered a raid in April 1942 on Augsburg's U-Boat diesel plant at low level in daylight, with a force of twelve Lancasters, when he was being urged to release aircraft to assist in the Battle of the Atlantic. Eight Lancasters and forty-nine aircrew were lost, although the Ministry of Information declared a triumph and Harris called it a "resounding blow that will echo around the world". Production at the Augsburg plant swiftly resumed. Within weeks of that raid, a thousand bombers were edging through the night on their way to Cologne. History has judged area bombing a strategic failure, while its morality was debated at the time and ever

“

The lure of squadrons of Spitfires flying down the Mall and into the pages of the Mail was hard to resist

since. Those who survived were given no campaign medal at the war's end. Churchill would distance himself from Harris's strategy. But the Lancaster became the mainstay of the nightly devastation.

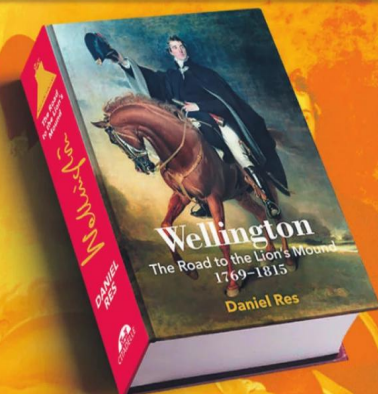
Nichol intends to honour the quiet heroism and dedication of the aircrews but something more terrifying and surreal emerges. Each aerodrome resembled a small town gouged out of the countryside at the service of the giant bombers. Aircrews self-selected in a "casual and swift ritual" resulting in a potentially lethal marriage. After a final decision by the pilot, seven souls were squeezed nightly into the aluminium frame of the Lancaster. The crew, on benzadrine, were blasted by freezing or hot air and subjected to din and vibration for seven hours or more. The bowel-loosening altitude and evasive manoeuvres resulted in many soiling their flying suits. Aircraft in vast bomber streams collided even before the enemy coast was crossed. Gunners could be wrenched from their aircraft by a stray bomb. Unseen enemy fighters raked the Lancaster's underbelly with their "schräge Musik" cannons. The hauntingly named Committee of Adjustment would quietly remove the contents of lockers of the lost and begin the bureaucratic process of notification of death - 55,000 in all, the highest loss rate of any service.

And then, when it was all over and peace came, those very same Lancasters dropped food to the starving Dutch from their bomb bays and participated in the Berlin airlift. Ground crews were given Cook's Tours over the gap-toothed German cities minus 7.5 million homes and 300,000 civilians. One tiny detail still haunts, the wreckage of a Lancaster repurposed by French farmers into cake tins and a wheelbarrow. Creation, destruction, resurrection. ■

Wellington

THE ROAD TO THE LION'S MOUND 1769-1815

DANIEL RES



'The Duke of Wellington is not just a figure belonging to British history but also one belonging to that of the whole of Europe. In this imaginative work, Czech historian, Daniel Res, both reminds us of this fact and gives us a wealth of insight into the rich vein of material on the Napoleonic Wars to be found in the archives of mittel Europa'.

CHARLES ESDAILE, author of *Napoleon, France and Waterloo: The Eagle Rejected*, and *Napoleon's Wars: An International History, 1803-1815*

Wellington – The Road to the Lion's Mound 1769-1815 is the first volume of the story of the 1st Duke of Wellington, the man who defeated Napoleon at Waterloo and became a celebrated hero not only in Britain and Europe, but throughout the world.

Daniel Res tells the gripping tale of Wellington's exploits, giving the book an almost novel-like readability. In it we discover the story of Wellington's youth in Ireland, his shaky beginnings in politics and the army, his first military success in India and his crucial engagements with Napoleonic France on the Iberian Peninsula as he fights his way from there to the south of France in 1814 – all events which culminate in the Battle of Waterloo the following year. Res presents Wellington not only as an ingenious commander, but also as a sensitive man, one often shaken by the realities and horrors of war.

Wellington is revealed to be an excellent horseman, a passionate reader, a gentleman, an impeccable organizer, perfectionist and workaholic, as well as being a Conservative politician with a notably British sense of humour.



ISBN: 9788090731127 FORMAT: HARDBACK RRP: £30 PAGES: 512
PUBLISHER: AMERIGO-CITADELLE RELEASE DATE: 30 SEP 2020



Shame praise

How Europeans viewed the Turks

MARGARET MESERVE

USEFUL ENEMIES

Islam and the Ottoman Empire in Western political thought, 1450–1750

NOEL MALCOLM

512pp. Oxford University Press. £25 (US \$34.95).

WHEN THE SCOTTISH TRAVELLER William Lithgow published an account of his journey through the Near East in 1632, he retold an old legend about Mecca. After the death of Muhammad, his followers had enclosed his body in an iron coffin and suspended it between two magnets in the floor and ceiling of the mosque, making the coffin seem to float in mid-air. The tomb was later transferred to Medina, a more convenient place for pilgrims. There, Ottoman officials forbade any Christian to approach the monument on pain of death – a law, Lithgow said, that was observed “more strictly ... than Princely Proclamations are obeyed ... or regarded with us”.

Forty years after the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism*, it may seem we know all we need to read an account such as Lithgow's. In that landmark study, Said shone new light on Christian Europe's long centuries of credulity and contempt for Islam. Travellers and scholars alike portrayed Islam as an invented faith, the Prophet as a charlatan with all sorts of ruses up his sleeve, from trained birds and cows to extra-strong magnets, and Muslims as slavish subjects, ready to shed the blood of unbelievers at the slightest provocation.

Said framed European views of Islam as one among many instruments of empire, a discursive net of scholarship used to keep the Orient down. But Lithgow began his travels in 1610, a moment when the Ottoman Empire was still a rising power, waging wars on two continents with Habsburg Austria and Safavid Persia. In Istanbul, Sultan Ahmed I had just started construction on the Blue Mosque. European diplomats made their way to the Sublime Porte seeking treaties and trade concessions. To a Europe racked by doctrinal disputes and debilitating religious wars, Ottoman political culture occasioned nervous astonishment and intimidation – even fear – but few dreams of empire.

In *Useful Enemies*, Noel Malcolm surveys the complex appraisals of Islam and its empires that characterized early modern political and ethnographic thought. He treats a broad sweep of territory, from apocalyptic panics of the late Middle Ages (provoked in part by the disasters of the later Crusades and the loss of Constantinople) to the musings of Enlightenment travellers and savants. Several well-known commentators on the Turks appear – Pius II, Erasmus, Machiavelli, Luther, Paolo Giovio, Guillaume Postel and Richard Knolles – but Malcolm brings lesser lights into focus as well. By surveying dozens of commentators, he reveals themes that endured for centuries: fear of Turkish arms, a grudging respect for Islamic social mores (charity, sobriety, civic order), and the conviction, articulated openly or simply implied, that a lax and sinful Europe might actually deserve whatever the sultan was about to dish out.

Malcolm describes admiration for Ottoman culture – sometimes called Turcophilia – as shame-praising, a useful phrase. This was a habit of talking about the Orient that fully centred the European observer. It was not that authors like Machiavelli or Calvin genuinely thought the Turks were better soldiers, more



William Lithgow by an unknown artist, seventeenth century

ingenious civic planners, or more devout believers; rather, finding something good in the world of Islam was a rhetorically effective way of showing up whatever failings the author wanted to reveal in his own society, or in that of some Christian rival closer to home. Hence Lithgow's comment that Ottomans obeyed their laws not just strictly, but more strictly than Christians were able to do.

However admirable Ottoman society may have been, for most Western observers, Islam was still an objectionable heresy – and thus useful for demonstrating how rival sects were equally offensive. For Lutherans, pope and sultan alike deceived their followers with “works” – alms, fasting and pilgrimage. Luther called Islam a “papistical” religion, and the Anglican Matthew Sutcliffe denounced the general ill of “Turcopapism”. His contemporary, the Catholic William Reynolds, published a dialogue denouncing Protestants and Muslims under the title *Calvino-Turcismus*. In Catholic eyes, Protestant iconoclasts attacked holy images as violently as any Saracen conqueror; anti-Trinitarians spurned the divinity of Christ as fervently as any caliph. Protestants, like Muslims, had fallen away from Catholic truth. Both landed on territory bereft of saints and sacraments.

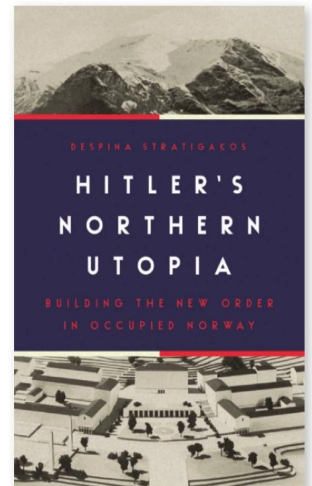
Meanwhile Christian princes sought to make the sultan their ally. The question of whether a prince could justly form an alliance with the “infidel” had been battled around in legal circles for centuries. Theologians and jurists of the sixteenth century argued that the prince's first duty was to protect not all of Christendom but his own state and subjects, using whatever means he could. Pacts with other legitimate states were fair game, and increasingly it seemed the Ottoman Empire might be one of them (even if few were ready to concede that Islam was a legitimate faith). The sultan could keep his word; his troops observed the rules of war about as well as Christian soldiers did. Travellers visiting Ottoman lands brought back reports of orderly cities with fewer beggars and less crime, and with more hospitals, soup kitchens and public baths than Christian cities enjoyed. Such observations may have been shame-praising, but they also conveyed real praise: the Turks got a lot of things right.

Refracted through these various lenses of praise and blame, the spectre of the Ottoman Empire exercised a profound effect on European intellectual life. Probing a foreign civilization and polity for its strengths (in order to shame one's neighbours) or weaknesses (in order to forecast its demise) laid the foundations for new forms of political science. And tracing connections between a faith and the society it animated cast religion itself in a new light – something to be considered not in terms of its inherent truth, but its social utility.

Noel Malcolm's deep reading across centuries of testimony gives the lie to what he calls the “blinkered view” that hostility was the only motive an early modern European might have for writing about the Islamic world. “The Eastern material ... was used to shake things up, to provoke, to shame, to galvanize.” In other words, Muslims were good to think with. ■

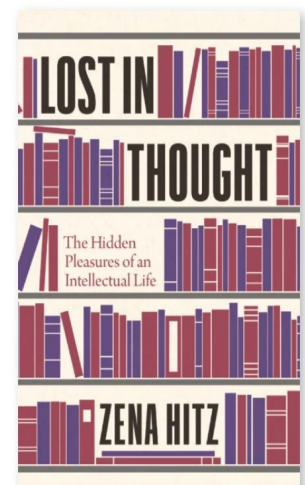
“There was a conviction that a lax and sinful Europe might actually deserve whatever the sultan was about to dish out

Margaret Meserve holds the Fabiano Collegiate Chair in Italian Studies at the University of Notre Dame. She is the author of *Empires of Islam in Renaissance Historical Thought*, 2008



“Using underexplored archives and bringing new material to light, *Hitler's Northern Utopia* is an excellent history.”

—Paul B. Jaskot, author of *The Architecture of Oppression*



“An inspirational attestation of the ability of intellectual activity to dignify oppressed lives. ... Much of this book is beautiful.”

—Sophie Duncan, *Literary Review*



“This insightful book deserves a wide audience.”

—Robert Gerwarth, author of *The Vanquished*

P PRINCETON
UNIVERSITY
PRESS

A love letter to Berlin

Why we fancy a Rheinland model

DANIEL JOHNSON

WHY THE GERMANS DO IT BETTER

Notes from a grown-up country

JOHN KAMPFNER

320pp. Atlantic Books. £16.99.



Angela Merkel,
Düsseldorf, August
2020

THE WORST THING about John Kampfner's survey of contemporary Germany is its title. It is too crude to do justice to the lively, intelligent, mostly fair and balanced contents. Intended to provoke, it succeeds merely in irritating. What precisely is the "it" that "the Germans" supposedly do "better"? And what exactly is a "grown-up country"? Is that even a very grown-up notion?

"The Germans I interviewed for this book ... all

recoiled at the thesis and the title of the book", he writes. "Without a single exception." Kampfner "passionately" disagrees. He believes that Germany does a great many things better - better, at least, than Britain or America. He claims that he merely hopes to "spark a debate, not to suggest superiority but to redress the balance of recent years". In that case, why not use a different title? The one he chose risks summoning up the very demons that he claims to exorcise. Perhaps

Kampfner and his publisher should have paid more attention to the views of the people he is depicting.

Still, there is plenty of good material here and the timing is impeccable. The handling of the Covid-19 crisis by Angela Merkel's government has been widely - and rightly - praised. Kampfner covers the first wave of the coronavirus, but the decision by the British to merge Public Health England and NHS Track and Trace into a National Institute for Health Protection, modelled on Germany's Robert Koch Institute, came too late for this book. It is of course a vindication of the German approach to pandemics, but it hardly supports Kampfner's claim that the British in general, and the Tory government in particular, are too arrogant to learn from the Germans. He blames Boris Johnson for mishandling the crisis, but the lower death rate in Germany has at least as much to do with the superiority of their insurance-based, decentralized health service to Britain's politically sacrosanct but chronically dysfunctional NHS.

Indeed, if imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, then the Germans ought to feel thoroughly flattered by the British. Over the past two centuries, we have followed their example on everything from pensions to music, from engineering to the environment. Kampfner's book is only the latest in a long tradition of admiring portraits of Germany, beginning with Madame de Staël's *De l'Allemagne* in 1813. In the UK, literary Germanophiles have included Thomas Carlyle, George Eliot and George Henry Lewes, Matthew Arnold, George Bernard Shaw, D. H. Lawrence, W. H. Auden, Christopher Isherwood, Stephen Spender and, of course, the late George Steiner.

One could even argue that Germany gets a better press than Britain, not merely in spite of its genocidal past, but precisely because of it. Only last year, the American philosopher Susan Neiman published *Learning from the Germans* (TLS, June 5, 2020), a powerful if problematic analysis of how much better the Germans have "worked off" their Nazi past, compared with the victorious Allies' unfinished business over slavery, racism and empire. Kampfner quotes Neiman, only to criticize her overgenerous view of East German anti-fascism: "she lets the GDR too easily off the hook". But the real defect of Neiman, which applies to Kampfner too, is that both authors take at face value the claim that Germany has been uniquely successful and virtuous in "overcoming" the memory of the Holocaust. Now the British and Americans, apparently, should similarly atone for their crimes against humanity.

Kampfner breezes through the "memory culture" that has arisen in Germany over the past half-century, from the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin to the *Stolpersteine*, the "stumble stones" that commemorate thousands of murdered families and individuals near their former homes. He acknowledges that it took decades after 1945 for the silence to be broken, for a genuinely open discussion and acknowledgement of guilt to emerge. But he glosses over the cover-ups and denials, the equivocations and evasions, the battles fought by business leaders, lawyers and diplomats to avoid restitution for slave labourers or other victims.

Antisemitism still resurfaces, not only on the neo-Nazi fringe, but in far-left and Islamist forms too. Kampfner has nothing but admiration for Mrs Merkel's decision to admit more than a million migrants from Syria and other Muslim countries. Five years later, a third are in work and integration is proceeding, slowly but surely - though a few are inimical to Western values. In the Jewish community, the influx has created a new sense of insecurity. Meanwhile, untold thousands of refugees have responded to the signal sent out by Berlin five years ago - and unknown numbers are still dying at sea.

Kampfner argues that Germans - and the rest of us - will miss Mrs Merkel more than we think: "her place in history will be far more distinguished than

“

If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, then the Germans ought to feel thoroughly flattered



Announcing

The Michael Marks Awards for Poetry Pamphlets 2020

with the generous support of the Michael Marks Charitable Trust in partnership with The TLS, the British Library, the Wordsworth Trust and Harvard University's Center for Hellenic Studies in Washington DC and in Nafplio Greece, and in association with the National Library of Scotland and the National Library of Wales.

The Michael Marks Poetry Award recognises an outstanding work of poetry published in pamphlet form in the UK between 1st August 2019 and September 30th 2020. Prize: £5,000 & a place on the Michael Marks Poets in Residence Program at the Center for Hellenic Studies in Greece

The Michael Marks Publishers' Award recognises an outstanding UK publisher of poetry in pamphlet form, based on their publishing programme between 1st August 2019 and September 30th 2020. Prize: £5,000

The Michael Marks Poetry in a Celtic Language Award recognises an outstanding poetry pamphlet published in the UK between 1st August 2019 and September 30th 2020, written in a Celtic language (Welsh, Scottish Gaelic, Irish, Cornish or Manx Gaelic). Prize: £2,000 & a place on the Michael Marks Poets in Residence Program at the Center for Hellenic Studies in Greece

The Michael Marks Illustration Award recognises outstanding illustration of a poetry pamphlet published between 1st August 2019 and September 30th 2020. Prize: £1,000

Judges

Poetry and Publishers' Award: Kei Miller, William Wootten, Natasha Bershadsky and Rachel Foss

Poetry in a Celtic Language Award: Dafydd Pritchard and Angus Peter Campbell

Illustration Award: Sir Nicholas Penny

Deadline for submissions - 4.00pm Wednesday 30th September 2020

Entry forms and submission guidelines from www.michaelmarksawards.org

most". Yet her record in office has for the most part been rather undistinguished. There have been few memorable moments during her time at the helm to compare with Willy Brandt's penitential genuflection to the victims of the Warsaw ghetto uprising, say, or the fall of the Berlin Wall under Helmut Kohl. It is, rather, for the values she represents that Germans cling to *Mutti*: stability, seriousness, duty. As next year's election and her retirement date approach, she is more popular than ever before. Angela Merkel symbolizes what Kampfnier calls "a grown-up country", piloting her people through the perils of populism, pandemic and climate panic.

Kampfnier is surely right about the virtues and vices of her low-key leadership. His depiction of German society during the Merkel years rings true. The country has enjoyed unprecedented prosperity without abdicating its social obligations to others less fortunate: the struggling Eastern provinces, the poorer EU states, the wretched of the earth.

Nothing is allowed to stand in the way of the continuing German *Wirtschaftswunder*, or economic miracle, still going strong some seventy years after Ludwig Erhard unleashed it. There is something miraculous, or at least impressive, about an economy that relies on saving and surpluses, growth and exports, social inclusion and regulated markets. Until a few years ago, German business still boasted of outpacing both the US and China as "world export champion".

There is, however, a dark side to what Kampfnier calls "the Wonder". A series of business scandals, among which the Volkswagen diesel emissions scam was only the most notorious, have brought the "Made in Germany" mythology down to earth. As Kampfnier concedes, many Germans are still in denial about the VW affair, even though the company has refused to pay for correcting the software on cheating cars. Perhaps this "aura of invincibility" explains why Wirecard was able to hide in plain sight for so long until it came crashing down this summer. German fraudsters, it seems, do it better, too.

Even when German business stays on the right side of the law, it is no less ruthless than others. By exchanging the Deutschmark for the euro, German corporations gained a pricing advantage that enabled them to dominate European markets: over two decades that bonus has been worth more than €2 trillion. Kampfnier presents Germany's role as "Europe's paymaster" as a selfless sacrifice: giving up "Germany's proudest global brand", the Deutschmark, "for the sake of European integration was nothing short of remarkable". But the EU still works for Germany - in some cases, literally so - however much it costs.

Kampfnier is much more persuasive when he talks up Germany than when he writes off Britain as a bombastic, xenophobic nation living on past glory. The truth is that the British seldom run down the Germans, at any rate in public. The last person I can think of who did so was the late Nicholas Ridley - and look what happened to him. Kampfnier cites John Gummer, who tells the story of how, when they were both environment ministers in the 1990s, the Merckels came to stay. He took her to a constituency meeting, at which "she was taken aback by the anti-European sentiments, the incessant invocation of the war". "I now know how difficult it is for you", she apparently said.

Kampfnier is fair-minded enough to devote well-researched chapters to Germany's less successful endeavours: its experiments in multiculturalism (which even Mrs Merkel said had "utterly failed" a decade ago); its botched energy policies ("No more *Pillepalle* [messing about]", she declared last year); and its foreign policy, which tends to ignore the US (Trump is an excuse rather than the rationale) while vacillating between obedience to Russia and, increasingly, to China.

Is this Sinophilia simply realpolitik - or something more sinister? Ai Weiwei certainly thought

so when he decided to abandon Berlin in favour of Cambridge last year. Kampfnier is dismissive of his concerns, but the artist and dissident evidently felt that German society reminded him too much of his native China. "They have a different kind of suit; it doesn't look like what they wore in the 1930s, but it still has the same kind of function." He told the *Guardian* that "to think one ideology is higher than others and to try to purify that ideology by dismissing other types of thinking. That's Nazism. And that Nazism

Daniel Johnson is Editor of the online platform TheArticle and the author of White King and Red Queen: How the Cold War was fought on the chessboard

perfectly exists in German daily life today".

Just because Ai Weiwei prefers what Kampfnier, quoting unnamed Germans, calls the "infantile and improvised" politics of Britain to the German obsession with rules, does not mean one society is superior to another. Germans tend to see rules as a protection against the chaos they associate with the Nazi past; the British, not so much. Yet there is no lack of empathy between these two rather similar nations. One isn't "better" or more "grown-up" than the other - just different. ■

Shelby Cullom Davis Center for Historical Studies "Revolutionary Change"

Historians have always considered moments of revolutionary change to be central objects of study. These moments do not necessarily involve politics, and are not limited to the modern world. The word "revolutionary" itself may be a relatively recent coinage (dating from the early modern period), but the sorts of change that it denotes have taken place in every area of human activity, and in every time and place. Revolutionary change is rapid and destabilizing. It is also dynamic, in the sense that it does not simply reflect or extend the forces which originally generated it, but builds on itself in original and often wholly-unpredictable ways. It can be both destructive and creative. It can entail a frightful human cost, but it can also open up new human possibilities and freedoms. It can take place on many different spatial and temporal scales—and at the same time, it can radically transform human understandings of the scales themselves. In 2020-22, the Davis Center seeks applications from historians working on revolutionary change in any period of human history, and in any area, including (but not limited to) the histories of politics, culture, ideas, social structure, gender relations, sexuality, race relations, religion and the environment. We also welcome applications from historians working on the concept of revolutionary change itself, on how moments of such change are retrospectively identified, and on failed, incomplete or ineffective examples. We are particularly interested in developing conversations among historians working on revolutionary change in different areas and periods.

Fellowships are awarded to scholars who hold full time academic positions, and who are expected to return to those positions at the conclusion of their Fellowship. Verification of employment and salary will be requested prior to approval by the Dean of the Faculty. PhD required. Fellowships may run either for one semester or for the full academic year.

To apply for a visiting position, please visit:

<https://puwebp.princeton.edu/AcadHire/position/12662>

The deadline for receipt of applications and letters of recommendation for fellowships is **December 1, 2020, 11:59 p.m. EST**. Applicants must apply online and submit a CV, cover letter, research proposal, abstract of proposal, and contact information for three references.

Princeton University is an Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action employer and all qualified applicants will receive consideration for employment without regard to age, race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, national origin, disability status, protected veteran status, or any other characteristic protected by law.



PRINCETON
UNIVERSITY

Poison in jest

An unexpected encounter with three lively dead women

LISA HILTON

HERE'S A LIST OF WOMEN:

Livia Drusilla, the wife of a Roman emperor
Eleanor of Aquitaine
Mary Queen of Scots
Catherine de Medici
Roxelana, the wife of Suleiman the Magnificent
Empress Cixi of China

Look them up – these women – and before you find out much else about them, you'll be informed that they were poisoners, murderers, adulterers. More often than not, historically renowned women seem to be bad women. Because power in women is allied with villainy.

I was thinking about this at my desk in a quiet corner of a Venetian palazzo, surrounded by many books of different kinds, some histories, others biographies or heavily annotated scholarly tracts. Outside, the lagoon was spread thickly with fog, and occasionally I heard a boat's siren sounding across the plain of water. My mind was weary. I had spent the day struggling with these weighty tomes. I lowered my copy of Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality* and decided to find something more amusing to read.

I chanced on a slight volume bound in faded red cloth among a pile sent from a library. I must have ordered it, though I did not recall doing so. It was *The Book of the City of Ladies*, by Christine de Pisan and, like many other works nowadays, it is said to be written in praise of women. Scarcely had I begun to read when my daughter called me from the kitchen, asking what was for dinner. I put the book to one side, resolving to go back to it the following day.

The next day, I went to the dry cleaner and the supermarket, cleaned the kitchen, did the laundry and swept the courtyard. Finally, seated once more at my desk, I returned to the book. On the first page, Christine asks "why on earth it was that so many men ... have said and continued to say and write such awful, damning things about women and their ways?" Describing these writers, she continues: "All seem to speak with one voice and are unanimous in their view that female nature is wholly given up to vice". Women are routinely accused of being little more than defective men, she says, intellectually and physically inadequate, creeping, whingeing, covetous creatures, who when they are not deceiving their husbands, secretly enjoy being raped. She suggests that the sources of such misogyny are ignorance, spite, envy, fear and impotence. And so Christine resolves to build a city in words, an impregnable fortress in which women "worthy of praise" will be admitted. Woman may well be lacking in muscular strength, she concedes, but nature has more than compensated her with brains. With her mortar mixed in her inkpot and great swingeing strokes of her pen, Christine sets out to construct a bastion of biographies to show by example that value is predicated on virtue, not gender. The year is 1405.

Christine de Pisan is Europe's earliest known professional female writer. Born in Venice in 1364, she moved to France as a small child, where her father Thomas had received an appointment as physician at the court of Charles V. Married at fifteen, she was widowed by the plague ten years later, and left with an elderly mother and three young children to support. Though women authors were not entirely unknown in the period, Christine, unlike for example Hildegard of Bingen, 260-odd years earlier, did not

publish from the security of the cloister. She was a sophisticated, secular woman, enormously well-read and familiar with the most exclusive echelon of French society in a time of impressive cultural development. In a pre-print culture, Christine first found work as a manuscript copyist before beginning to produce her own poetry and tracts. She waded confidently and prominently into one of the primary intellectual debates of the day, siding with Jean Gerson, the Chancellor of the University of Paris, against Pierre Col, the canon of Notre-Dame, on the inadequacies of the bestselling poem *Le Roman de la rose*. Some years before she published *City*, Christine had written *Epistre au Dieu d'amours* (*A Letter to the God of Love*) in which she criticized the author of the *Roman de la rose*, Jean de Meun, for what she considered a despicably silly portrayal of women. In the *City*, Christine expands her argument, pitting herself proudly and wittily against male writers past and present.

I confess, when I picked up *The City of Ladies* I had read more about Christine than I had read by her. She is considered a canonical feminist writer, if not (outside academia) a particularly famous one. *Le Livre de la cité des dames*, as it was first published, was, Simone de Beauvoir noted, "the first time that we see a woman take up her pen in defence of her sex". The book takes the form of a series of dialogues between the author and three allegorical figures: Reason, Justice and Rectitude. We meet the author in 1405 as she is in the familiar process of retiring to bed, exhausted after work and childcare. Christine is a character in her own text, an ingénue who innocently repeats the misogynist arguments her reading has thrown up, and she initially portrays herself as despairing over women's lack of virtue. But the allegories wake her, berate her for sloth and set about challenging her on her views about women. They explain that she is ignorant and misinformed by the prejudiced accounts she has read. And they summon a cast of historical characters to reinforce their arguments and recount the exemplary lives of the women who should be the first residents of an allegorical city, where they will be recognized and protected. These include queens of classical history such as Penthesilea and Antiope, numerous female saints and less famous figures, such as a Roman woman who breastfed her own mother in prison. Reason argues – reasonably enough – that negative stereotypes are maintained through women's exclusion from the writing of history; only by examining women's history from a woman's perspective can female virtue be recognized and celebrated. This project Christine undertook. The work was translated into English in 1521, with no new translation attempted until 1982. Within this period, the revolution in women's status sought by Reason took place. Partly.

Nearly every article and commentary I have read on Christine – from the critique of her "conservative" political theory by Sheila Delany in the 1970s to Tai Shani's 2019 Turner Prize-winning installation *DC: Semiramis* – seems nonetheless to see her status as a female author as inherently compromised or problematic. The techniques Christine adopts in *City* include the allegorical "dream vision", which simultaneously relates and glosses the author's journey. This was a highly typical medieval form, familiar from, say, Dante or Boccaccio. (It is traceable to the fifth-century Roman writer Macrobius's commentary on Cicero's *Dream of Scipio*; and in the sixth century came Boethius's *The Consolations of Philosophy*, which features "Philosophy" personified as a woman.) Christine also draws on the exemplary biography genre, established in classical antiquity. Or, more specifically, the exemplary female biography, previously attempted by Ovid in *Heriodes* and by Chaucer in *The Legend of Good Women*. Both men critiqued misogyny's effect on history, though admittedly in a rather more lackadaisical fashion. But while these writers have been praised more or less uncomplicatedly for their interventions, Christine has been second-guessed, her efforts undercut by a persistent focus on her own place, or role, in the work.

Because her character-self plays the role of Devil's



Advocate in the text, upholding the limited views and conventions of the day for Reason, Justice and Rectitude to demolish, Christine has been accused of timidity and hypocrisy, of endorsing the very inequalities (such as fifteenth-century women's lack of legal status), which she professes to challenge. Scholars of both the medieval period and contemporary feminism have seemed particularly troubled by this technique. In her dialogues with Reason, Justice and Rectitude, Christine cites texts that denigrate women, beginning with the *Lamentations* of Matheolus, a thirteenth-century cleric who produced a wordy account of precisely how women make men's lives unbearable (not that anyone would bother with Matheolus nowadays were it not for Christine). She tells Reason about the numerous books she has read which say "extraordinarily unpleasant things" about women, including a Latin text entitled *On the Secrets of Women*, which claims that the female body is "flawed" and "defective". Reason replies: "You shouldn't need any other evidence than that of your own body to realize that this book is a complete fabrication and stuffed with lies. Though some may attribute the book to Aristotle, it is unthinkable that a philosopher as great as he would have produced such outrageous nonsense".

Even though she voices Reason, Christine has been accused of ambivalence and of disclaiming her authority as a writer – a female writer – by hiding behind a fiction. Is she a revolutionary dressed up as a conservative, or the other way around? (No one seems to worry that, in adopting the dream-vision convention, Chaucer was disclaiming his authority as a male writer, peeping out from behind a trope.)

In detecting such covert strategies in *City*, is it not possible that we are falling into precisely the habit demonstrated by Christine's persona, of seeing femaleness as inherently problematic: a defective, untrustworthy version of male authority? *City* is not the work of a timid or anxious author. For a start, it's very funny. Christine's daring is to have her persona come around to meekly accept statements that might seem self-evident to a twenty-first-century reader, but which were fairly radical for the fifteenth century – "it is now clear to me", she says earnestly, "that God has truly made women's minds sharp enough to learn". *City* is also audacious. In her reception of the Virtues and her acceptance of their challenge, Christine parallels the sacred words of the Annunciation, when the Virgin Mary received the news that she was to give birth to the Son of God: "Behold your handmaiden, ready to do your bidding". There is something of the gleeful relish of early Jane Austen in her brisk dismissal of a thousand years of scholastic certitude: "Humankind would never have become one with God if Eve hadn't sinned". But

Lisa Hilton is a historian and novelist. Her book, *Ultima, the last in the Maestra trilogy*, was published in 2018



Lucrezia Borgia;
Cleopatra VII;
Catherine the Great

to read Christine anachronistically, to investigate her words for contemporary preoccupations, to judge her a feminist or not, is to miss the point.

Sunk in these thoughts, I slumped against the arm of the chair with my cheek resting on my hand. Outside, it had grown dark. The fog had risen once more, swaddling the palazzo in silence. I must have fallen into a deep sleep, for all of a sudden a beam of light shocked my eyes open. And there between the dining table and the kitchen door, I thought I saw three women. As you can imagine, I was terrified. They had silently entered a room whose doors and windows were all closed. Since I am of the twenty-first century, I didn't imagine that they were apparitions come to tempt me; I thought they were probably crackheads and reached for my mobile phone to call the police. But, as usual, the phone had disappeared among the books and papers. There was nothing for it but to confront them, so I rose to my feet. When I saw that one of them had no head, I sat down again rather quickly.

At least, she didn't so much have no head as many heads. That is, in the place where a person's head is usually found, there was a swirl of images. One moment there was a lazy-eyed, plump-faced blonde, the next a high-cheekboned African woman with plum-dark skin, then a stern, hook-nosed woman with long, painted eyes. On and on they spun. I hesitated, transfixed by infinite variety. When I noticed that one of the faces was Katy Perry's, I realized I was dreaming and relaxed.

"Don't worry", she said. "You'll get used to it. No one knows what I looked like."

"I wish I could say the same", put in the second woman, who had a very definite head, generous about the chins, with a large pouffed hat, much beribboned, from which a few curls of thick grey hair poked out. It sat oddly with the rest of her outfit, which was an eighteenth-century military uniform, finished with polished riding boots and spurs.

"So do I" added the third, dressed in a plain grey gown of coarse linen, and with her neck and hair covered by a dark nun's wimple.

"I like your frock. Is it Khaite?" I tried.

"Franciscan."

A pause.

"There's three of you?" I asked.

"She's catching on", said the woman in the military get-up.

"Which one are you?" Even for a person whose sleep had been so abruptly invaded that sounded brusque, so I stood up respectfully and elaborated. "Reason, Rectitude or Justice?"

"I'm Sophie", she replied. "But you'll know me as Catherine. This is Lucrezia. And this—"

"I think I know. Cleopatra?"

"Cleopatra the Last, to be precise. There were a few others."

I held my tongue. There didn't seem much else to do. After a while, the silence felt awkward, so I offered the visitors some tea. When we were all sitting with mismatched mugs - I would have had to root in the cupboard for the best china, then wash it, and besides, excessive domestic competence doesn't play if you want a relatable protagonist - they looked at me expectantly.

"So can we get in?" one of them asked.

I should say that the conversation didn't take place in English. Sometimes they spoke individually, sometimes with one but never the same voice. Between them the women spoke the Egyptian language, Latin, Greek, French, Spanish, German, Italian, Russian and Catalan.

Yet we seemed to understand one another.

"It looks like you already have."

"To the City."

"Christine's city?"

"Sharp as a knife, this one", said Catherine.

"But - why?" I asked. "Christine wanted to rescue women whose stories hadn't been told. Everyone knows about you already."

"Precisely", said Lucrezia. "It's exhausting, being dragged about, from book to book. We fancy a rest."

The problem is that Christine had it that "Only ladies who are of good reputation and worthy of praise will be admitted into this city. To those lacking in virtue, its gates will remain forever closed". For example: there's the virgin Camilla, who grew up in the wilderness with her father, the deposed king of Volscia. She trained herself to become a great warrior, won back her father's kingdom and refused to take a husband or sleep with a man. Then there are the Sabine women, who were abducted by the ancient Romans but nonetheless interceded with their vengeful kinsmen to prevent a massacre. Saint Lucy, Saint Margaret, Saint Justine - all virgins. The three apparitions standing before me were not known for their virtue.

"Ladies", I said, "I think - probably not."

"Why not?"

"Well, two of you weren't born when she wrote the book, so—"

"That shouldn't matter. She says the city will stand for all time."

I took a deep breath. "Have you ever Googled yourselves? I assume you know what Google is?"

Cleopatra rolled all of her eyes.

"Actually, did you know that I'm a winner in 'Epic Historical Rap Battles' on YouTube?" said Catherine.

I did not. Nor did I ask her to clarify.

"You're wicked", I explained nervously. "Any search term you try, you'll find yourselves at the top of the lists: Wicked women, murderous women, notorious women ..."

"Perverts", put in Catherine in a satisfied tone.

"I'm sorry, but yes", I said. "We all know it's not true about the horse. But I have heard the word 'abnormal'."

"It's not as though Christine was all that choosy", said Cleopatra. "She accepted Medea into the city, and she didn't even mention me! Not like Chaucer. He said I was 'never to her lover truer queen'."

"Only because you topped yourself for love", said Lucrezia, rather insensitively, I thought.

"He made up that pit of snakes! Rubbish."

Catherine interjected: "But isn't it all different now everyone's a feminist? We weren't really bad, it was only the patriarchy. We deserve to be re-empowered".

"I don't think power was really the problem for any of you, if you don't mind my saying."

"Empowerment is different."

They had a point. Empowerment is a relatively new concept. Worldwide, it inspires and motivates women through quotes and viral hashtags. It sells us T-shirts ("This is what a feminist looks like", "I Say I", make-up ("because we're worth it") and scatter cushions with slogans such as "Empowered women empower women". It has helped publishing out of a profit slump, with countless variations on the

theme of "Forgotten Kick-ass Feminists of History".

Christine's *City* was also the product of an interesting historical moment in publishing. It was to be another generation before Johannes Gutenberg adapted the mechanism for moveable type long known in East Asia, to produce the first Western printing press around 1440. Christine was writing on the brink of an information innovation as profound as the digital revolution that has transformed the modern world. The printing press took books out of the enclosed, Latinate world of the monasteries and made them available in larger numbers to ordinary people, particularly women and girls. Since girls were infrequently educated in Latin, the intellectual lingua franca of Europe, vernacular literature was a new and exciting female market. Almost as though in anticipation, Christine wrote *City* in French rather than Latin. Publishers were tapping into this promising new market and trying to catch their readers young, as we see from an image in the mid-fifteenth-century Harley manuscript entitled "een groepje lezende vrouwen" ("a little group of reading women"), considered by scholars to be the earliest representation of young girls in a secular classroom. Children's books at the time were designed to imbue religious faith as well as rudimentary literacy, but in this little woodcut we can also detect a significant shift towards the empowerment of women.

More than 600 years later, Western women have never been more empowered, we are told; feminism is no longer a rare and dirty word, and our culture is ready to be remade by and for women as never before. Which is nice.

The rhetoric of empowerment is ubiquitous, but its manifestations fox under scrutiny. Our girls never did come back. In the US, womb control is regressing from dystopian fiction to legal reality. Christian Dior and many other high fashion brands promote shallow "couture activism", yet remain reluctant to discuss the huge profits made in states such as Saudi Arabia, where women are welcome to buy a \$5,000 jacket but not to try it on in a shop. The abuse of women's rights from Yemen to Mali to India is something to which international politics remains prepared to turn a blind eye. Beyond the facile positivity of a culture that has annexed feminism to commerce, what female power is and what female power does remains conflicted and ambiguous.

"More tea, anyone?" asked Lucrezia.

"No, I'm fine, thanks", I said too quickly.

She giggled.

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to imply—"

"Poison? We were all at it. Have you seen the Medici archives? Poison for breakfast, lunch and dinner. 'A deadly powder mixed with sugar, not unpleasant in taste, which did not immediately drive out the breath of life ... but gradually made its way into the veins and brought death.' The Borgia Venom, they called it."

"But did you really?"

"Never needed to. It's just part of the legend."

"I did", said Cleopatra, "on my youngest brother, Ptolemy XIV. One day he was just ... gone."

"We used to say 'travelling in Europe'", added Catherine.

"You're not helping yourselves, ladies."

"Well, look: we want into the city now. Century after century, they never let up. Victim or villain, we never know whether we're coming or going. It's time we retired from history."

"I fancy a garden", said Lucrezia, "somewhere to grow herbs."

"A nice game of billiards of an evening", said Catherine.

"I'd like my head back", said Cleopatra.

"Forgive me", I said. "You're feminist icons. Isn't that enough?"

"And a kaftan", added Cleopatra. "Something comfy." ■

Sex and the City of Ladies: Rewriting history with Cleopatra, Lucrezia Borgia and Catherine the Great by Lisa Hilton is published by TLS Books this week at £7.99

Books that got away

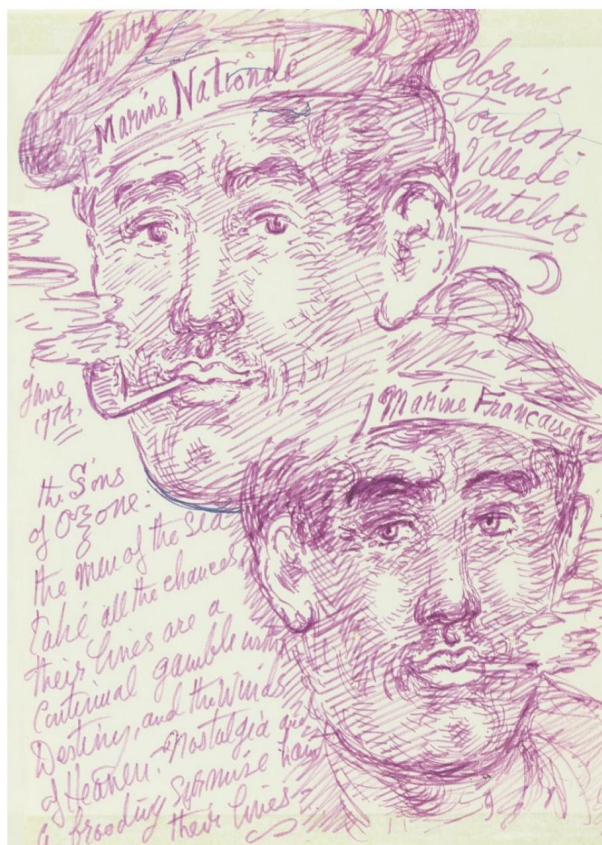
D. J. TAYLOR

THE STYLE COUNCIL, whose music I listened to about thirty-five years ago, once issued a collection of rarities and studio out-takes called *Here's Some That Got Away*. It was an encouraging title, for it suggested that works of the creative imagination have a life of their own, slip out from the conceptual nets sent to pinion them and go streaking off into a kind of aesthetic hinterland where the writer, artist or musician cannot easily follow. I remembered it this spring when, with the constraints of lockdown making their presence felt, I decided to clean out the study.

There on an obscure shelf, beneath a dozen undisposed-of author's copies of a book about the English novel written in 1993, were all sorts of things that had "got away", in my case meaning never been published, or in some cases never even finished. Fifteen thousand words of a mock-Victorian novel about the Tichborne Claimant, for example. Ideas for short stories with - to my ear, at least - promising titles like "The Politics of Dancing" or "Notes For While I'm Away", several of them conceived as long ago as the Style Council. What had happened to them? What fatal flaw had laid them low? And why, if it came to that, had I bothered to keep them?

It takes only a moment or two of browsing the average writer's biography to establish that literary life is full of books that got away. At the same time, the taxonomy of the phantom novel whose manuscript lies gathering dust on the study shelf is more complex than it seems. Naturally, straightforward lack of merit plays a part. Kingsley Amis, for example, was candid enough to admit that "The Legacy", his first attempt at a novel, written in 1945-6, at least four years before he began work on the hugely successful *Lucky Jim* (1954), was simply no good. Worse, according to Zachary Leader's conscientious biography, *The Life of Kingsley Amis* (2006), "The Legacy" was an example of the kind of novel its author shortly afterwards came to loathe, "full of affectation, full of modernist trickery, full of all the kinds of shock tactics that very soon afterwards I despised completely". Leader, in his role as faithful biographer, insists that the book has its virtues, that the moral issues it raises are subtly dramatized, but Amis is evidently relieved that his career hadn't been encumbered by this false start. He was positively grateful that such firms as Longman, Gollancz and Collins sent it back.

To lack of merit could - at any rate in the pre-*Chat-terley* era - be added objections on moral grounds. In the early 1880s, piqued by the spectacular non-success of his debut *Workers in the Dawn* (forty-nine copies sold), George Gissing completed a novel with the watchdog-baiting title *Mrs Grundy's Enemies*.



This in itself was enough to alert potential sponsors to its insalubrious nature, and according to Gissing's biographer Pierre Coustillas the manuscript spent years in out of the publisher Richard Bentley's office being rewritten, bowdlerized and nervously toned down, put into catalogues only to be taken out of them again, advertised and then disclaimed, before eventually vanishing into the Paternoster Row ether.

If no sleuthing bibliophile has ever been able to establish the fate of *Mrs Grundy's Enemies*, then the same uncertainty hangs over the miniature library-full of books denied publication on legal grounds. Francis King, who died in 2011, may well have been joking when he maintained that a second volume of memoirs booked to follow *Yesterday Came Suddenly* (1993) had perished at the hands of the libel lawyers. Perhaps he was. But Mrs Thatcher's biographer Charles Moore certainly took six months off from his journalistic duties in the early 1990s to write a novel called *The Real World*, only to see the book withdrawn when the Conservative Party's *éminence grise*, Sir Alfred Sherman, complained that he was depicted in it.

Sherman died in 2006, raising the question of why we can't now read Moore's fictional portrait of him. Perhaps it is merely that no one is interested in Sir Alfred any more. All of which leads us to another crucial sub-category: the books that are either written too far ahead of their time or too far behind it. In the first group, one might put Emma Tennant's *Emil: The first woman dictatorship*, apparently written in the late 1960s, and of which its author remarked a decade or so later that Andre Deutsch, her publisher at the time, "said it made him feel sick". Tennant went on to add that "there weren't any feminist publishing houses around then, and all the other publishers felt sick too".

In the second can be found a clump of middle-aged, middle-class women novelists left high and dry by the tastes of the trend-conscious 60s. At almost exactly the same time that Elizabeth Taylor, the author of *A Summer Season* (1961), was being damned for essentially writing about well-heeled Home Counties types ("we cannot be sure that she herself understands how marginal and decadent

"Glorious Toulon, Ville de Matelots" by Stephen Tennant, 1974

this part of English society has become", one critic complained), Cape were dispensing with Barbara Pym's services on the grounds that its retiring and ladylike author had failed to keep up with the zeitgeist.

Then, of course, there is sheer mishap, loss, forfeiture, accident. The publisher Anthony Blond was lunching at MGM in the early 1980s when the studio archivist handed him a typescript entitled "The Tenth Man" by Graham Greene, which had been lurking in the vault since Greene, then an MGM hireling, had finished it in July 1945. The novella was published with huge success a year or so later. By chance, not long before this, Blond had also brought out Simon Raven's *An Inch of Fortune*, a debut work written in the early 1950s, several times rejected, resubmitted and lost. It was rediscovered in a trunk when the firm of Blond & Briggs were moving premises and, as Raven put it, "for the first occasion in twenty-eight years, positively and sympathetically read".

Taste. Mischance. My Learned Friends ... All these, you might feel, are easy categorizations. Behind them though, lurks something much less decipherable: the shadow of the author who desires practically any outcome other than that their darling work should appear in print. Literary history is full of arch-procrastinators, writers who took forty or even fifty years to complete, or not complete, the book they were born to write. Few of them, though, provide as much of a psychological puzzle as the younger son of the First Baron Glenconner, the Honourable Stephen Tennant.

If anyone remembers Tennant these days, it is as the most ornamental of the 1920s era Bright Young People - see the countless photographs of him taken by Cecil Beaton - or perhaps as the lover of Siegfried Sassoon. But, like his niece Emma, Tennant (1906-87) had literary ambitions. Having published a somewhat recherché affair called *Leaves From A Missionary's Notebook* in 1937, he immediately set to work on the novel that, he believed, would make his reputation. "How exciting about the new book", his then publisher, Roger Senhouse, enthused later in the same year. As it was, Senhouse died a third of a century later without having seen a line of it.

The progress, or non-progress, of *Lascar: A tale of the maritime boulevards* can be traced through Philip Hoare's invaluable *Serious Pleasures: The life of Stephen Tennant* (1990). Ten years later, he was reminding himself that he "must finish" the book and asking the advice of such friends as Cyril Connolly, E. M. Forster and Willa Cather. All through the 1950s and 60s, as he lapsed into the life of an eccentric recluse on his family's Wilsford Manor estate in Wiltshire, the work went on. Passages were set up in type so that he could have the pleasure of travelling back by train from the printers as he corrected his "proofs".

As late as 1980, Tennant was telling Beaton's biographer, Hugo Vickers, that he was "working on a novel so exciting, a thriller set in Marseilles in the 20s". Connolly, who had had pages of the manuscript read to him (he recalled "the vocabulary of a loveless and raffish housemaid") was astute enough to connect the book's non-appearance to its author's personal myth. Publication, he decided, would shatter the view that Tennant took of himself. "Essentially he is an adolescent exhibitionist acting out the role of a *grand écrivain méconnu*", he pronounced. "Is writing really necessary to act out such a part?" Perhaps not. But on Tennant's death, 500,000 words of rainbow-inked manuscript, comprising seven separate versions of the novel, were found among his papers.

Some enterprising publisher ought to start a Phantom Library in which works like *The Legacy* and *The Real World* could finally get their due. But it probably ought not to include Stephen Tennant. For *Lascar: A tale of the maritime boulevards*, as Connolly deduced, occupies a virtually unique spot in literary history. Unlike most of the other books that "got away", it is a novel that was written not to be published. ■

D. J. Taylor's latest books are *Lost Girls: Love, war and literature 1939-1951, 2019*, and *On 'Nineteen Eighty-Four': A biography, 2019*

THE EDWIN MELLEN PRESS

John Welsey's Vegetarianism:
Should A Spirit-Filled Christian
Abstain From Eating Animals?

by

Dr Samuel J. Rogal
ISBN 978-1-4955-0789-2

Publish your scholarly book with Mellen
peer reviewed

www.mellenpress.com

Rembrandt and Rorschach

Deals and desires in the world of Dutch Golden Age fans

ELIZABETH LOWRY

MY REMBRANDT

Various cinemas and on demand



DRUMLANRIG CASTLE, and the Duke of Buccleuch is locking up for the night. Before going to bed he spends a few quiet moments alone in a remote room with a certain “glorious lady”. “I have a very strong sense of her in my head”, he murmurs, gazing at the object of his adoration, hands clasped: she is “the most powerful presence in this house”. Taco Dibbits - the Director General of Amsterdam’s Rijksmuseum - wants her too, but for now the Duke of Buccleuch has her. “You fall in love on the spot”, Dibbits confesses, wondering if he might ever induce the Duke to part with her. “Never say never”, he adds hopefully.

The lady in question? Rembrandt’s “An Old Woman Reading” (1655), which has been in the Buccleuch collection for generations. Together with “The Standard Bearer” (1636), owned by the Rothschilds, and his “Portrait of Jan Six” (1654) in the Six Collection in Amsterdam, she is, Dibbits explains, one of the Dutch master’s most covetable works. He’s been invited to Drumlanrig in Dumfries and Galloway to assist the Duke in rehanging the picture. Together they ease her from her frame and protective glass and bear her, naked, through successive rooms, agonizing about lighting and position, moving sofas to suit her. After the theft of a Leonardo from the castle in 2003 she’s been exiled to a higher floor, but now the Duke is bringing her back downstairs. “You want to live with her”, sighs a crestfallen Dibbits. “Yes”, breathes the Duke. In this case, “never” means never.

Oeke Hoogendijk’s riveting documentary highlights the peculiar tendency among private collectors and public curators of Rembrandt’s portraits to talk about his canvases as if they were living people. For the serious devotee Rembrandt appears to be a sort of Rorschach test, revealing a capacity for ardour, or envy; for candour, or duplicity - or for ecstatic belief. In Amsterdam, the boyish art dealer Jan Six - a direct descendant of the seventeenth-century cloth merchant immortalized by Rembrandt - is convinced that he’s spotted not just one, but two undiscovered works by the painter. Six has been trying all his life to live up to his family legacy. The Sixes are part of Amsterdam’s aristocracy; in every generation so far since Rembrandt painted them, a Jan Six has been produced to be the keeper of the family flame and the custodian of its priceless art collection. The tenth Jan Six, the rather dour Baron Jan Six van Hillegom, still presides over the Six house on the Herengracht with its treasure trove, but the eleventh Six is snapping at his heels. He has an art historian’s training, and a relentless desire to prove himself.

Could “Let the Little Children Come to Me” (c.1620s), the apparently very ordinary Baroque picture of Christ surrounded by onlookers which is being sold by a German auction house in 2014, be an adulterated Rembrandt? Jan Six XI certainly thinks so. “There he is”, he declares, pointing out what looks just like a young Rembrandt van Rijn in

the background of the composition, shown with mouth parted, eyes wide. The figures in the foreground are a later overpainting, but Six has recognized the energy and the excitement in that face, which is, it has to be said, the spit of the artist’s known youthful self-portraits. Rembrandt often included himself in his own early pictures. It’s always possible that someone else might have put him in this one, but extremely unlikely since at this time he wasn’t yet well known: “it was only later he would become a rock star”, twinkles Six. If this is a Rembrandt then the find is a staggering coup: one of the earliest of his canvases on record, painted when he was about nineteen - and the first new picture by him to have been discovered in forty years.

A restorer is commissioned to scrape off the offending overlay, a four-year process. But the indefatigable Six is already convinced that he’s identified a second Rembrandt, at Christie’s London showroom. This is the portrait of a bemused-looking young man, dating from between 1633 and 1635, simply listed as “circle of Rembrandt”. Rubbish, insists Six: the modelling of the face, in particular the characteristic S shape of the facial shadows, not to mention the subtly quizzical gaze, quite clearly mark it out as being by Rembrandt himself. The elder Six is sceptical, but his son closes the deal through an anonymous investor for a mere £137,000 (“Christie’s will be in big trouble!”) and brings in the venerable Dutch authority on Rembrandt, Ernst van de Wetering, to deliver his verdict. At first unpersuaded, van de Wetering is gradually won over - not by the face, but the lace. The collar on the figure is painted with Rembrandt’s telltale irregularity (where other artists observed a strict verisimilitude in their geometric lace designs, Rembrandt always introduced some variation in his patterns, or a curled edge, grasping that imperfection looks more real than perfection). But it’s the cuff that’s “the miracle”: a seamless weave of shadow and light, lapping the wrist in palpable folds. Utterly seduced, the octogenarian scholar hovers shyly in front of the picture like a lad on a first date. “You have to get to know this stranger”, he blushes.

Jan Six is undoubtedly right about one thing: the “Portrait of a Young Gentleman” looks so real, “you’ll get a fright”. Which again invites the question: when you’re buying a Rembrandt, are you buying a canvas, or a human being? Meet the Soolmanses. Having shared the same Paris bedroom for years, the dandyish lawyer Marten Soolmans and his socialite wife Oopjen Coppit are headed for an acrimonious divorce. Rembrandt painted the spectacularly lifelike full-length portraits of this fashionable couple in 1634 on the occasion of their marriage. Recently they’ve been hanging as a pair in the home of Baron Éric de Rothschild, one on each side of his bed. In 2016, however, Rothschild is forced to sell them to settle a family tax bill.

The Rijksmuseum is ready to pounce; the only

The Duke of Buccleuch and “An Old Woman Reading”, from *My Rembrandt*

“**There is a peculiar tendency among private collectors and public curators of Rembrandt’s portraits to talk about his canvases as if they were living people**”

Elizabeth Lowry’s novel about the hunt for a missing Old Master painting, *The Bellini Madonna*, appeared in 2008. Her latest novel, *Dark Water*, was longlisted for the Walter Scott Prize in 2019

problem is the asking price of €160 million. The Louvre indicates that it’s prepared to go halves on this sum, but after months of fundraising in which the Dutch scrape together nearly all of it and the French have yet to contribute a penny, the Rijksmuseum is about to dispense with their help. Rather than lose the chance to own the pictures entirely, France’s culture minister steps in with a pledge of 80 million and the Solomon-like suggestion that each nation should keep and exhibit one. After much air-kissing and back-stabbing a diplomatic incident is narrowly averted, but only because the Rijksmuseum can’t bear to split the Soolmanses up. The joint purchase goes through after all: husband and wife will scuttle between Paris and Amsterdam in perpetual rotation. “We should have bought them quietly”, mutters Dibbits. Through this awkward arrangement the Louvre and the Rijksmuseum are forever married, like Meneer and Mevrouw Soolmans themselves.

Intriguingly, the willingness of Rembrandt collectors to let the world intrude on their romance with their pictures seems to be inversely proportional to the length of the relationship. The American billionaire businessman Thomas Kaplan has been conducting “a raid on Rembrandts” and the art of the Dutch Golden Age only since 2003, but he’s already acquired over 250 paintings and drawings by various major artists. Kaplan’s mission is to share the love: his collection is freely available on loan to museums and installations. Even here, though, there’s more than a hint of uxoriousness. How did he feel on owning his first ever Rembrandt, the “Study of a Woman in a White Cap” (1640)? “I felt joy, materialistic joy”, he offers; what it sounds like, however, is spiritual and sensual delight. After buying the picture Kaplan simply couldn’t believe that he had “the legal right to touch it, to feel the paint”. He makes a remarkable admission: “When I first saw her in the flesh I went up to the painting, I took it by both sides of the frame, and I kissed her on the lips”.

The story of Jan Six’s discoveries has a shabby postscript. After unveiling the “Portrait of a Young Gentleman” live on Dutch television, he’s jubilant: at last he’s soared clear of his family, and now “it’s only me and Rembrandt”. And then comes the accusation of cheating by a fellow dealer who alleges that he was in on the identification of the picture from the outset, but cut out of the sale and the resulting glory at the last minute (something Six vehemently denies). Like the life of the notoriously litigious Rembrandt himself - “all lawsuits, quarrels, shouting”, as Six puts it - the aftermath of the unveiling is a depressing spectacle, accusations and counter-accusations flying about like sticky oil paint. Never mind: Jan Six XI is tenacious. In the last glimpse we get of him he is holding up a cartoon by Rembrandt of Abraham sacrificing his son Isaac. “Rembrandt was much affected by the father-son relationship”, he muses, “and I suspect that he also painted this scene, and we don’t know the painting.” Wouldn’t it be fantastic if that painting suddenly turned up? “I suspect it might just be my next discovery”, ventures Six, with his yearning, childlike smile. ■

Who Were The Rich?

William D. Rubinstein’s
definitive volumes from
1805 onwards

www.eerpublishing.com

Sim-salabim

From one director to another,
across the world

HENRY HITCHINGS

PLAYING BY EAR

Reflections on sound and music

PETER BROOK

152pp. Nick Hern Books. Paperback, £7.99.

AS IF BY CHANCE

Journeys, theatres, lives

DAVID LAN

320pp. Faber. £16.99.



Marcello Magni, Kathryn Hunter and Khalifa Natour in *Come and Go* by Samuel Beckett, 2008, directed by Peter Brook

RIGHT NOW, ANY COMMENT on British theatre needs to be prefaced with the acknowledgment that it is in jeopardy. Covid-19 has caused its buildings to close and has paralysed its largely freelance workforce. The government's rescue package notwithstanding, there is a risk that much of Britain's fragile theatrical ecosystem will perish. Such sombre thoughts can make the usual complaints about the defects of that system feel piffling. But this moment, grim as it is, also affords an opportunity to reflect on theatre's accessibility and economics, and these two books, though they may come to seem documents of theatre's halcyon days, engage with the art form's particular magic and what it means for an audience to be in a room together.

British theatre is often decried for fetishizing texts and for sanctifying the past, rather than delivering visual excitement and fostering progressive thought. This is a function, so the theories go, of a great many British directors having studied English Literature at Cambridge, or of a depraved national appetite for aspic, or of a culture that routinely mistakes parochialism for a pride in its heritage. In truth, the text-fanciers have rarely been quite as dominant as their detractors like to claim. But in any case they are now outnumbered, even if not outgunned, by the apostles of "horizontal" creativity - devisers, frame-breakers and post-dramatic collectives.

No one has done more to inspire this change than Peter Brook. The restlessly curious director, ninety-five in March, launched his professional career in the 1940s; he was twenty-one when he first directed at Stratford-upon-Avon, and twenty-four when his production of Richard Strauss's *Salome*, with sets by Salvador Dalí, opened at Covent Garden. Delighted to unlearn the orthodoxies of English art, he imbibed the ideas of Vsevolod Meyerhold, Jerzy Grotowski, Jan Kott, Antonin Artaud and Bertolt Brecht. He shook up the Royal Shakespeare Company, notably with his harrowing take on Peter Weiss's *Marat/Sade*, and pioneered an exuberant eclecticism that prompted Kenneth Tynan to remark that he was an artist for gourmets - "He cooks with cream, blood and spices. Bread-and-water addicts must look elsewhere".

But Brook gradually developed a more ascetic style. He is indelibly associated with the words "the empty space"; his book of that name, published in 1968, described the deadliness of mainstream British theatre and proposed a more immediate, trans-cultural approach. Many have cherished his vision of a theatre unencumbered by the baggage of tradition, though as his influence has slowly ramified, a few dissenters, wondering whether space can ever really be "empty", have accused him of being blasé about the possibility that the burdens of context are morally necessary.

Two years after *The Empty Space*, Brook's fame peaked, with a defoliated *Midsummer Night's Dream* for the RSC. Set in what appeared to be a white gymnasium hung with swings, the play seemed freshly magical and sexy. The *New York Times* hailed the production as "the most important work yet of the world's most imaginative and inventive director". But in the fifty years since, Brook has based himself in Paris, at some remove from such ovations, and he has increasingly been a nomad, a seeker of truths, fluent in the Esperanto of mysticism. In his recent work the dislike of clutter has become a minimalism that's at once austere and sedate. Critics like to say that he has metamorphosed from showman into shaman, although traces of the former remain.

Playing by Ear is a collection of essays and fragments, united by an emphasis on the importance of listening. Though there are moments when Brook's manner seduces, it's frequently sibylline. "The making of sound is one of the most profound and the most intimate actions", he writes, perhaps tempting the reader to think of rude counterexamples. But silence is even more precious, for in a world full of noise, "it is in the infinitesimal gaps that life comes through".

The book's biographical snippets have a certain twinkle. Brook recalls Arturo Toscanini extracting a sublime performance from an orchestra by "listening with tiny movements of the head" and Pierre Monteux galvanizing the musicians at New York's Met with the simple observation, "Gentlemen, I am sure you can play better than that!" There's a vignette of Soviet Prague, where an admirer insists on being escorted to his hotel room, not to dispense "a fascinating lesson on how the sexual freedom of the 1960s had penetrated the Iron Curtain", but for a different kind of congress, turning on the bathroom taps to make eavesdropping impossible.

Yet for all Brook's insistence that "Our need in every form is to become more and more sensitive to detail", the language of *Playing by Ear* is often imprecise. Oscar Wilde is "highly colourful", and Samuel Beckett's *Happy Days* a "radiant and demanding monologue"; on their first appearance in New York, "Chinese acrobats ... demonstrated that the way to suggest the fairies of the spirit world was ... by evoking lightness with the lightness of seemingly effortless acrobatics". He claims that Brexit "has the sound of excrement" and contrasts this with the euphonious qualities of Shakespeare - to which end he misquotes the well-known opening of Sonnet 18. Some of his assessments are suggestive: "A five-act opera is one long phrase. For Wagnerians this is the magic of Wagner". But then, a few pages later, he writes that "A play of Shakespeare is one long phrase", and the pronouncement's specificity dissolves.

“Nobody in Britain has done more to sustain Peter Brook's principles than David Lan

Slight as *Playing by Ear* may be, it still imparts a sense of the commitments that have defined its author's career: a hunger for collaboration; an impatience with both slutty commercialism and stuffy insularity; an aversion to the idea that the artist has a single, unified vision; and a preference, as he once said in an interview with the *Daily Mail*, not for theatre-goers to be dunked in "a bath of sentiment", but for "the notion of disturbance, which leaves you in a state of greater inquiry".

Nobody in Britain has done more to sustain Brook's principles than David Lan, whose memoir *As if by Chance* is a zigzagging meditation on the peculiar knottiness of theatre and the processes by which it is made. When Lan travelled from his native South Africa to Britain as a teenager in the late 1960s, Brook, whose Latvian heritage he shared, was one of the theatrical luminaries who agreed to meet him. *The Empty Space* made a deep impression on Lan, and he has since spoken of it as "the only book on theatre that really matters". As artistic director of the Young Vic from 2000 to 2018, he was able - and thrilled - to provide a London home for productions by Brook's company.

Lan's theatrical instincts were quick to emerge. As a child in Cape Town, he was conscious of being an outsider: gay and Jewish, he often moved stealthily among his more ebullient peers, while also cultivating a forthright defiance. Keen to escape an airless world where his surname met with hostile interest ("Are you Chinese or what?"), he read widely, even as he recognized that the domestic dysfunction playing out a few feet away was the richest material of all: "Overhearing grown-ups quarrelling in the next room is how theatre begins". Fascinated by puppets, he worked as a magician's assistant, and he punctuates his account of later adventures in stage sorcery with the words "Sim-salabim", a beguiling alternative to "Abracadabra".

At twenty, Lan moved to London for good. Studying social anthropology, he was struck by the relationship between guerrillas and Shona spiritualists in the Zambezi Valley. His doctoral thesis on the subject anticipated several features of his career in theatre: extensive fieldwork, an interest in the strategic importance of places usually treated as backwaters, and an eagerness to examine the mechanisms of political resistance. Though he has won plaudits as a playwright, translator and documentary-maker, he has preferred to be a nurturer of other people's projects. At the Young Vic he was a mixture of impresario, alchemist, agitator and midwife, inheriting a building that seemed to be falling down around his ears and transforming it into what he calls a "neighbourhood theatre plugged into the world" - a stimulus for community spirit and a beacon of internationalism. He gave a platform to local talent and supported young directors, while also hosting the best theatre-makers from Iceland, Norway, Palestine and Australia.

Aficionados of arts-world anecdote will enjoy Lan's recollections of being screamed at by David Mamet after rejecting his "talky, abstract" take on *Faustus*, learning in his teens about the modern novel from J. M. Coetzee ("he was so mordant and dour we knew he was special though he hadn't yet published a novel of his own"), and gawping at the sight of the director Patrice Chéreau stumbling out of a taxi looking like a defeated boxer (he'd got drunk in his hotel room and collided with the minibar). But this is much more than an album of snapshots. Switching between dreamy impressionism and a fierce specificity, it's a searching account of a varied life. Sometimes tough-minded and sometimes earnestly vulnerable, Lan is forever hopping between fascinations and locales: from Aimé Césaire to Chekhov, from a Namibian dirt track to Tel Aviv or Thessaloniki. Resolutely non-linear, *As if by Chance* is true to Peter Brook's dictum that "Truth in the theatre is always on the move" - and to Lan's particular yen for throwing the audience off-balance, requiring people to open their eyes wider than before (and retune their ears). ■

Henry Hitchings was for ten years the theatre critic for London's Evening Standard

Saving David Bowie

Reflections of a pioneering German musician-composer

IAN THOMSON

FORCE MAJEURE

Tangerine Dream – The autobiography

EDGAR FROESE

Translated by Paul Bonin
381pp. Astral Horizon Press. £44.99.



Poster for *Force Majeure* by Tangerine Dream, 1979

TANGERINE DREAM, founded in West Berlin in 1967 by the German musician-composer Edgar Froese, was less a band than a pioneer electronic art project. By his own account, Froese was influenced by the atmospheric sound clusters of the Hungarian composer György Ligeti and the repetitive tape loops of the American minimalist Terry Riley. It is difficult to imagine how alien Tangerine Dream must have sounded to rock audiences brought up on the mellow denim heaven of Linda Ronstadt and the Eagles. Early albums such as *Phaedra*, *Rubycon* and *Ricochet* were among the first commercial recordings to use the emerging technology of sequencers. Released in the mid-1970s, these albums anticipated the “Berlin School” of electronica typified by computer-generated synth beats and pulsing dancefloor rhythms. The New Age ambient sound washes of, say, DJ Shadow and Boards of Canada acknowledge the example set half a century ago by Tangerine Dream.

Froese, who died in 2015 at the age of seventy, was born in Tilsit in East Prussia (now the Russian-Baltic city of Sovetsk) on the day Allied forces landed in Normandy. His father, a salesman, was killed by the Nazis; Froese was barely six when his mother and surviving family took him to Berlin. There, amid the moral and material ruins of Germany in its “zero hour”, Froese attended art school and, in 1965, formed a Jimi Hendrix-inspired rock outfit called The Ones. With their Dadaist stage antics, The Ones were invited to play an early gig at Salvador Dalí’s mountain retreat in Catalonia. Dalí, a “narcissistic Sun King” surrounded by a motley group of hangers-on and flatterers, did not personally impress the twenty-year-old Froese. Yet, as Froese relates in *Force Majeure*, his fascinating, posthumously published memoir, the Spanish artist left his mark on the surrealist soundscapes of Tangerine Dream.

The group’s debut album, *Electronic Meditation*, recorded in a rented Berlin factory in 1969, combined hypnotic, drum-driven threnodies with solo guitar and cello jams and snatches of backward spoken word. At once archaic and abstract-modern, the music eschewed the “square” German music scene known as Schlager, with its marzipan-sweet Euro crooning, in favour of a free-form musical waywardness. The trilogy of Tangerine Dream albums that followed in the early 1970s – *Alpha Centauri*, *Zeit* and *Atem* – were so-called Krautrock masterworks, that owed little to the blues rock clichés of the Rolling Stones or the tepid, well-mannered progressive pretensions of Yes, Genesis and other British stadium behemoths. A haunting new *kosmiche* (“cosmic”) music had arisen from the wreck of post-Nazi Germany, and it was like nothing else at the time.

Force Majeure, left unfinished at Froese’s death, is perhaps inevitably repetitive at times, with odd punctuation and other hiccups along the way. Froese was “not exactly velvet-tongued” as a writer,

says Bianca Froese-Acquaye, his widow and the memoir’s editor. He had a dry forthright wit, however, and he tells a good story. *Phaedra*, we learn, was taped in 1973 at Richard Branson’s fledgling Virgin label studio in a crumbling Oxfordshire mansion, and almost capsized due to power cuts and the presence of an Irish wolfhound called Bootleg, who urinated into Froese’s Mellotron synthesizer. Froese and his bandmates Christopher Franke and Peter Baumann were surprised when *Phaedra* reached

number fifteen in the UK charts in 1974. The BBC DJ John Peel regularly played tracks from the album on his Radio 1 show alongside Soft Machine, Captain Beefheart and, a while later, punk.

In a wonderful chapter, Froese chronicles his friendship with David Bowie, who settled in Germany in 1976 in order to kick a cocaine habit acquired in Los Angeles while making *Station to Station*. Dressed in a “checked lumberjack shirt” and bobble hat, Bowie moved into the Froese family home in West Berlin’s Schöneberg district, where he eventually recovered. Bowie admired Froese’s solo album *Epsilon in Malaysian Pale* (1975), and immersed himself studiously in the industrial klingklang of Kraftwerk and other contemporary German bands such as Neu!, Cluster and Harmonia. Pre-glasnost East Berlin, with its shadowy, Harry Palmer atmosphere, was a melancholy place in the 1970s, hemmed in by border guards and barbed wire. Yet Froese maintains Bowie found a corollary for his depressed state in the bleakness of the Stasi-infiltrated eastern zone. He recorded his *Low* and *Heroes* albums at Hansa studios, a shed-like building overlooking the Wall, where Tangerine Dream also recorded.

The group provided the soundtrack to *Sorcerer* (1977), William Friedkin’s remake of *The Wages of Fear*, resulting in their eighth and last great album. After that, disappointingly, Tangerine Dream turned out ever blander, arena-filling muzak, with bogus lyrics and even (as in their Dante-inspired musical extravaganza of 2002, *Inferno*) histrionic-sounding choirs. *Force Majeure*, however, is absorbing from start to finish, and opens a window onto an abidingly strange music. ■

“

A haunting new *kosmiche* (“cosmic”) music had arisen from the wreck of post-Nazi Germany, and it was like nothing else at the time

Ian Thomson’s books include *Primo Levi: The elements of a life*, 2002, and *The Dead Yard: Tales of modern Jamaica*, 2009. He is Senior Lecturer in Creative Non-Fiction at the University of East Anglia

Notre Dame Institute for
ADVANCED STUDY

RESILIENCE

Call for Fellows for 2021-2022

The Notre Dame Institute for Advanced Study seeks fellowship applicants who are pursuing research on resilience. Scholars from all academic disciplines are encouraged to apply. **Application Deadline:** October 5, 2020

For more information and to apply visit:
ndias.nd.edu/resilience

UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME | **RESEARCH**

Tongue and heart

A novel of capacious women and disappointed men

NORMA CLARKE

**ISLANDS OF MERCY
ROSE TREMAIN**

368pp. Chatto and Windus. £18.99.

SET IN 1865, *Islands of Mercy* rewrites *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights*, the whole of Jane Austen and all Victorian courtship novels written in the grip of British high imperial patriarchy. Rose Tremain's women are resourceful, energetic, creative, bold and kind; and for the most part they do not wish to waste these qualities on lesser men.

Clorinda Morrissey, going from Dublin to Bath to better herself, sells the one valuable article in her possession, a ruby necklace passed down through the generations. The money that enables her to establish a high-class tea room in an old funeral parlour signals life over death, a fresh start over the stagnant pieties of the past. Almost forty, she pretends to be a widow "because widows survived



far more cleverly in English society than spinsters". She wants "to live for herself, to travel her own road", an ambition shared by the artist Emmeline Adeane and the married, bisexual Julietta Sims. All three women nurture, inspire, love and protect Tremain's protagonist: Emmeline's niece, the twenty-four-year old Jane.

The novel begins with an unwelcome marriage proposal the consequences of which unfold in settings that take us from Bath to London, Paris, Dublin

**'Bowled (bold)' from
the Victorian series
Cricket Extraordinary**

and Borneo. Jane, who rejects the proposal out of hand, sitting in Mrs Morrissey's tea room and shrewdly observed by her, is a nurse with powers of healing that have given her local repute. She is "The Angel of the Baths". She is happy to tend men and does not dislike them, but she pities what she considers to be their childlike natures and their emotional cowardice. She is exceptionally tall, which makes her feel strong and special. Her suitor, Dr Valentine Ross, is a decent, conventional man, efficient at his job, a little damaged by being the less-loved son of parents who preferred his brother Edmund, but acceptable husband material. A woman who took it as her duty and pleasure to build him up, make him the centre of her emotional life, would have served him well. Tremain never quite puts it like this, but in Ross she dramatizes the pathology identified in Virginia Woolf's book-length essay *Three Guineas*: that of the man who expects and needs to see himself magnified in women's eyes. When this doesn't happen, Ross is inconsolable. His self-loathing and shame feed an inner darkness that belittles and brutalizes him.

Jane, meanwhile, visiting her aunt in Chelsea and mixing in bohemian circles, is transfixed by the beautiful Julietta and rapidly, gloriously, taken to bed. Jane's discovery that she doesn't love men and does love women is lightly handled, as if it has no special significance except that it requires a bit more thought if she is to have the best of life - as Julietta already has and Aunt Emmeline wants for her. Julietta is famously devoted to the joy of sex, and her tongue, "*la langue de Juliette*", is celebrated as "the greatest bringer of pleasure a woman could ever know"; her understanding husband shares her with the "beauties" who come and go. Guilt-free, rich, happy as a wife and mother, Julietta has internalized and claimed as her right freedoms formerly reserved for the dominant sex. Her love is not without its problems but it is elastic and capacious, its soft power contrasting with the violence of disappointed men.

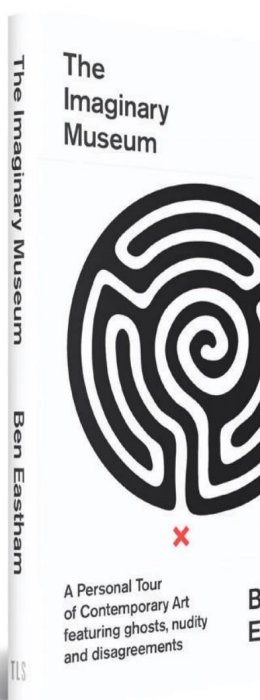
Layered like one of Mrs Morrissey's Victoria Sponge cakes, *Islands of Mercy* is a quietly mischievous evocation of the Victorian era as it ought to have been. Tonally, Tremain mixes the serious with the ludicrous. Human behaviour is her quarry and she knows how easily it can descend from the sublime into the farcical. Even a tall, strong woman like Jane is at the mercy of men whose minds have been corrupted by false ideas, such as the necessary submission of women. Similarly troubling power is wielded by philanthropists who convince themselves they are doing good, as does Sir Ralph Savage, Queen Victoria's representative in Borneo - "nin-poop" to his local lover, Leon. An eccentric, weak with erotic adoration as he listens to the King James Bible being read aloud in the jungle, Sir Ralph is a figure of fun. But he is not harmless: building a pointless road, blowing up trees and poisoning a river, he is a symbol of the evil and madness of colonial power. He is not Joseph Conrad's Kurtz but we are morally in *Heart of Darkness* territory. Tremain's skill, as she moves easily inside the thoughts of all the major characters, is to convince us to extend some sympathy to the Sir Ralphs of this world. His self-recognition is touching when he observes the destruction he has wrought, and sees in it "a terrible landscape of what was in his heart".

Less forgiveness is extended to Dr Valentine Ross, whose own heart is corroded. There are good men: Jane's father, Sir William, a doctor; and Julietta's husband, Ashton, a publisher. In a scene towards the end Tremain brings them together as Julietta rushes upstairs to comfort Jane, breezily urging Ashton to tell her lover's father "man to man", over a glass of claret, "the whole terrible story". Ashton tells some of it, but cannot bring himself to reveal all. Sir William, we are told, was left with the story "as if told by an author who disdains to apportion to his characters reason and motive". Such is not Rose Tremain's way. The reasons may be irrational and the motives unclear but the author, respecting both the demands of her art and the human endeavours of her characters, disdains none of it. ■

A gallery that never closes.

Join the art critic
Ben Eastham on a
private tour of an
extraordinary museum.

Now available in the TLS shop.
Order yours today at
shop.the-tls.co.uk



Norma Clarke is
Emeritus Professor of
English Literature at
Kingston University

Cloacal reeks and arcing axes

GEORGE BERRIDGE

THE ABSTAINER
IAN MCGUIRE

368pp. Scribner. £14.99.

IAN MCGUIRE'S NEW NOVEL, *The Abstinence*, begins in Manchester, 1867, with the hanging of three men accused of murdering a police officer. The condemned are members of the Fenian Brotherhood, an Irish-American group that sought to release Ireland from English rule. ("We have suffered centuries of outrage, enforced poverty, and bitter misery. Our rights and liberties have been trampled on by an alien aristocracy, who treating us as foes, usurped our lands, and drew away from our unfortunate country all material riches.") The men would go on to be known as the Manchester Martyrs. Their end, when it comes, takes the form of this macabre vanishing act:

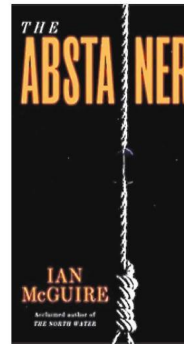
The three men stand side by side beneath the heavy oak crossbeam, separate but conjoined, like rough-hewn caryatids, and then with a startling suddenness they are gone. Instead of their breathing, living bodies there are only three taut lines of rope like long vertical scratches on the prison wall.

The scene quickly brings to mind McGuire's previous book, *The North Water* (TLS, September 30, 2016), which is set less than a decade before, opens with a brutal rape and murder, after which the killer, standing over the body, coldly observes: "What the nigger boy used to be has now disappeared. He is gone completely, and something else, something wholly different, has appeared instead".

In Manchester, as the police attempt to quell further insurrection, the Brotherhood, seeking revenge, sign a pact with the devil. He arrives in the form of Stephen Doyle, a man whose bloody proficiencies have been honed during the American Civil War, at both Chancellorsville and Gettysburg: "The world beats its savage drum, and he - unthinking and heedless - steps to its measure". This innate devotion to violence again recalls the villain of *The North Water*, Henry Drax, who "grasps onto the world like a dog biting into bone - nothing is obscure to him, nothing is separate from his fierce and surly appetites".

Drax, a harpooner, was pursued by Patrick Sumner, a disgraced former soldier and opium addict, whose habit warped into an obsessive hunt. We now find Doyle - who has motives of his own, aside from serving the Brotherhood - in a cat-and-mouse game with the policeman Stephen O'Connor, who is Irish-born and distrusted by his English colleagues. O'Connor's wife and child have recently died, a tragedy over which he has given up the bottle. Addiction and madness feature heavily in both books, and McGuire remains keen and sensitive in his depiction of a man looking desperately to fill an empty cup. When O'Connor takes comfort in a woman, "his body feels newly minted. It is as if he has remembered something about himself that had slipped his mind or been covered over by time".

These moments of bliss and beauty are rare, but



George Berridge works at the TLS

this is no real gripe since McGuire is so comfortable writing about the nightmarish and repellent. The city's assault on the senses is particularly well done: there is the "keen, cloacal reek of the caged rats"; the fog, "rough-grained and maculate", which takes two men and "holds them tight in its grey-brown fist"; the air "bitter and gamey". His uses of simile are judicious, the best left for gruesome sounds: a crow's caw is "like a dry cork pulled from a bottle"; a man falls, "his cheek and forehead, unprotected, slap down onto the wet pavement like a side of beef slipped from a butcher's hook"; in a moment of fever, O'Connor "makes hoarse, guttural noises only, shrieks and yelps like the crude agitations of an imbecile or a frightened ape".

The search for Doyle leaves O'Connor untethered from good sense, ousted from his job and returning to drink. His carelessness is lethal to those around him, which allows Doyle to slip the net for a time. The book's conclusion is cleverly understated, leading us away from the penultimate act, a final spectacle of gore, in which we see two men "weirdly conjoined, the ancient axe and its sweat-stained handle stretched out between them like a blood-back cord". There is, once again, a vague sense of déjà vu. Here we have "the blade ... arcing brightly through the darkened air ... the chipped steel edge cuts down into neck muscle and spine bone"; Drax's end had come when a blade swung "forward in a hard flat arc. The jagged edge strikes just above the collar bone".

McGuire is always a pleasure - and horror - to read, and *The Abstinence* is without question a very fine book in and of itself: darkly compelling, with its polished prose and snappy dialogue. And yet, read after its predecessor, it strikes one - despite the dread and fog and blood - as safe, as if its author has too readily returned to a winning formula. ■

Better expectations

ROBERT DOUGLAS-FAIRHURST

THE DICKENS BOY
THOMAS KENEALLY

400pp. Sceptre. £20.

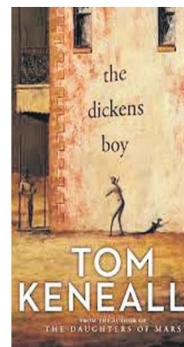
BEING A CHILD of Charles Dickens cannot have been easy. "I am certain that the children of my father's brain were much more real to him at times than we were", confessed his eldest son Charley, and as Dickens's real children grew up it became increasingly clear that they were also far less easy to control. (He had ten in all with his wife Catherine, nine of whom made it into adulthood.) Dickens worried about their "lack of energy" and inability to apply themselves in the way that he prided himself on doing; repeatedly they seemed to find new ways of disappointing him. Often his response was to send them overseas, like characters in a set of stories he didn't have time to write.

Walter was packed off to India, where he achieved the rank of lieutenant in the East India Company before falling into debt and dying young; Francis joined the Bengal Mounted Police, and later Canada's Northwest Mounted Police. However, it was Australia that Dickens was especially drawn to as a place where his sons could make a name for themselves, or at least live in a way that wouldn't disgrace his own name. He had already sent fictional characters such as Micawber and Magwitch there to give them a second chance in life, not to mention dozens of real female inmates from Urania Cottage, the refuge for former prostitutes he had established in Shepherd's Bush with money from the philanthropist Angela Burdett-

Coutts. In Dickens's eyes, Australia was an opportunity to slough off the past, a blank page just waiting to be written on. Accordingly, he sent out two of his sons to try their luck in the outback: first Alfred, who left England (and many unpaid debts) behind him when he was twenty, and then Edward (Plorn), who was just fifteen when Dickens declared that he wanted "an active life" for his youngest son and put him on board an emigrants' ship.

Their stories didn't have happy endings. As Thomas Keneally pointed out in a *Guardian* article in 2010, although Plorn had some early success as a sheep farmer and gentleman cricketer, in 1894 he lost his seat as a member of the Legislative Assembly of New South Wales, and eight years later he died alone in a hotel during a summer heatwave. Alfred was financially broken by an economic depression in the 1890s; he spent the final years of his life touring Britain and America offering reminiscences of his father and reading extracts from his books. Their overseas adventures form the central premiss of Keneally's *The Dickens Boy*, though the author doesn't follow Plorn and Alfred very far into their new lives. Instead his main focus is on Plorn's arrival in Australia and his first couple of years living in the dusty outback. The result is a novel that is part-*Bildungsroman* and part-*Boy's Own* adventure yarn - one that is strong in atmosphere but curiously thin in terms of plot.

Observing Australia through Plorn's eyes, we are given a ground-level perspective on the country's strange, raw beauty: "huge skies which intoxicated one with their immensity", and immense flocks of sheep that appear in the distance as "a dull grey rumour". We are also introduced to an entertaining cast of supporting characters, including a would-be novelist who has written a surprisingly frank account of his love affair with an attractive



Robert Douglas-Fairhurst's new book, *The Turning Point: A year in the life of Charles Dickens*, will be published next year

young aunt, and a stammering English aristocrat who much prefers the outback to the miserable life he has left behind. But none of these figures is as vividly drawn as the one who never appears in person: the man his children refer to as "The Guvnor".

"How far did the reverberations of my father reach?" wonders Plorn, and the answer turns out to be much further than he could have imagined. Strangers recite chunks of their favourite novels at him, along with gossip about his father's liaison with the actress Ellen Ternan, and they keep reminding him of what it means to be a Dickens but not the Dickens. Surprisingly, Plorn claims not to have read any of his father's books (perhaps, if we're being generous, this might explain why Keneally has him refer to Bill Sikes and Miss Havisham as "Bill Sykes" and "Miss Haversham"), and he also has some surprisingly modern attitudes when it comes to matters of race and sexuality, whether he is happily playing in a cricket team made up of white settlers and Aboriginal Australians or gently batting away the advances of a gay colleague. And yet, despite such attitudes, he remains a "very ordinary fellow", both blessed and cursed to be the son of an extraordinary writer.

The Dickens Boy is the latest addition to a growing shelf of novels that have attempted to give Dickens a postcolonial twist, the main difference here being that, unlike in books such as Peter Carey's *Jack Maggs* (1997) or Lloyd Jones's *Mister Pip* (2006), Keneally's main aim is not to re-imagine one of Dickens's novels but to re-examine the writer himself from a new, oblique angle. It is certainly a bold idea, and when we are told early on that "the air sang with possibility" it neatly sums up Keneally's ambition. Unfortunately, the novel itself is captured rather better by Plorn's later remark on the beautiful appearance of the Australian countryside in winter: spangled with frost and condensation, it "glinted forth promises it might not keep". ■



Tortuous sentences

An extract from *Red Pill*

HARI KUNZRU

Tired and preoccupied, I arrived in Berlin the next day to begin a three-month residency at the Deuter Center, out in the far western suburb of Wannsee. It was just after New Year, and the wheels of the taxi crunched down the driveway over a thin crust of snow. As I caught my first glimpse of the villa, emerging from behind a curtain of white-frosted pines, it seemed like the precise objective correlative of my emotional state, a house that I recognized from some deep and melancholy place inside myself. It was large but unremarkable, a sober construction with a sharply pitched gray-tiled roof and a pale façade pierced by rows of tall windows. Its only peculiarity was a modern annex that extended out from one side, a glass cube that seemed to function as an office.

I paid the driver and staggered up the front steps with my bags. Before I could ring the bell, there was a buzzing sound, and the door opened onto a large, echoing hallway. I stepped through it, feeling like a fairytale prince entering the ogre's castle, but instead of a sleeping princess, I was greeted by a jovial porter in English country tweeds. His manner seemed at odds with the somber surroundings. He positively twinkled with warmth, his eyes wide and his chest puffed out, apparently with the pleasure induced by my arrival. Had my journey been smooth? Would I like some coffee? A folder had been prepared with a keycard and various documents requiring my signature. The director and the rest of the staff were looking forward to meeting me. In the meantime, I would find mineral water and towels in my room. If I needed anything, anything at all, I had only to ask. I assured him that the only thing I wanted was to change and take a look at my study.

Of course, he said. Please allow me to help you with your cases.

We took an elevator to the third floor, where he showed me into a sort of luxurious garret. The space was clean and bright and modern, with pine furniture and crisp white sheets on a bed tucked under the sloping beams of the roof. The heaters were sleek rectangular grids, the windows double-glazed. In one corner was a little kitchenette, with a hot plate and a fridge. A door led through to a well-appointed bathroom. Despite these conveniences,

the room had an austere quality that I found pleasing. It was a place to work, to contemplate.

When the Deuter Center wrote to offer me the fellowship, I immediately pictured myself as the “poor poet” in a nineteenth-century painting I’d once seen on a visit to Munich. The poet sits up in bed wearing a nightcap edged in gold thread, with gold-rimmed spectacles perched on his nose and a quill clamped between his jaws like a pirate’s cutlass. His attic room has holes in the windows and is obviously cold, since he’s bundled up in an old dressing gown, patched at one elbow. He’s been using pages from his own work to light the fire, which has now gone out. His possessions are meager, a hat, a coat and a stick, a candle stub in a bottle, a wash basin, a threadbare towel, a torn umbrella hanging from the ceiling. Around him books are piled upon books. Flat against his raised knees he holds a manuscript and with his free hand he makes a strange “OK” gesture, pressing thumb against forefinger. Is he scanning a verse? Crushing a bedbug? Or is he making a hole? Could he possibly be contemplating absence, the meaninglessness of existence, nothingness, the void? The poet doesn’t care about his physical surroundings, or if he does, he’s making the best of things. He is absorbed in his artistic labor. That was how I wanted to be, who I wanted to be, at least for a while.

The Center’s full name was the Deuter Center for Social and Cultural Research. Its founder, an industrialist with a utopian streak, had endowed it with some minor part of a fortune made during the years of the postwar economic miracle, with the aim of fostering what he airily called “the full potential of the individual human spirit.” In practical terms, this meant that throughout the year a floating population of writers and scholars was in residence at the Deuter family’s old lakeside villa, catered to by a staff of librarians, cleaners, cooks and computer technicians, all dedicated to promoting an atmosphere in which the fellows could achieve as much work as possible, without being burdened by the practical aspects of daily existence.

I was what they call an “independent scholar.” I had an adjunct gig at a university, but it was in a Creative Writing department, and I tried not to think about it except when it was actually happening to me, when I was sitting in a seminar room, pinned by the hollow stares of a dozen debt-ridden graduate students awaiting instruction. What I

“The Poor Poet” by
Carl Spitzweg, 1839

wrote was published by magazines and commercial publishers, not peer-reviewed journals. Academics found me vaguely disreputable, and I suppose I was. I’ve never been much for disciplinary boundaries. I’m interested in what I’m interested in. Five years before my invitation to Berlin I had published a book about taste, in which I’d argued (not very insistently) that it was intrinsic to human identity. This was barely a thesis, more a sort of bright shiny thing that kept the reader meandering along as I strung together some thoughts on literature, music, cinema and politics. It wasn’t the book I was supposed to be writing, an ambitious work in which I intended to make a definitive case for the revolutionary potential of the arts. The taste book sort of drifted out of me, first as a distraction from the notebooks I was filling with quotations and ideas for my definitive case for the revolutionary potential of the arts, then as a distraction from the creeping realization that I really had no definitive case to make at all, or even a provisional one. I had no clue why anyone should care about the arts, let alone be spurred by them to revolution. I cared about art, but I was essentially a waster, and throughout my life other people had never liked the things I did. The only political slogan that had ever really moved me was *Ne travaillez jamais* and the attempt to live that out had run into the predictable obstacles. The trouble is there’s no outside, nowhere for the disaffected to go. Refusal is meaningful if conducted *en masse*, but most people seem to want to cozy up to anyone with the slightest bit of power, and nothing is more scary than being left at the front when a crowd melts away behind you. Why, after all this time was the “general reader” suddenly going to find me persuasive? Why would I even want to persuade him or her? What would starting an argument achieve? If I wanted a fight, all I had to do was look at my phone. So I kept my head down and wrote my distracted essays.

I’d been a freelance writer since I was twenty-three. It is a ridiculous thing to do. It’s time-consuming and poorly paid. You live on your nerves. Sure, you can lie on the couch if you want, but eventually you will starve. I was in despair because I’d wasted so much time on the revolution book, and I’d just got together with Rei and needed money to make things happen for us, and suddenly I couldn’t summon the energy for the pretensions of a system, so I just wrote about some things I liked, things that made me happy, and my exhaustion must have transmitted itself in some positive manner onto the page – I am the first to admit that I’m usually a hectoring and difficult writer, given to obscurity and tortuous sentences – because a publisher offered me a contract and along with it a way out, a plausible excuse for shelving the impossible revolutionary art project, smothering the damn thing with a pillow. A mercy killing would otherwise have been embarrassing, since I’d been talking about the book for years, doing panel discussions and think-pieces and sounding off at parties. I finished the little taste book fairly quickly, and unlike my previous work, it sold. You see, said my agent, all you had to do was stop battering people over the head.

I did the things you do when you have a successful book. I gave interviews. I accepted invitations to festivals and conferences. Translations were sold. People bought me dinner. Then, gradually, my editor began to inquire about what I was doing next. Mostly what I was doing was getting married and moving apartments and having a baby and not sleeping and realizing that a successful book is not the same thing, financially, as a successful film or a successful song, and writing a couple of prestigious but underpaid magazine essays and agreeing to teach another class and still not sleeping much, but more than before, though still not enough to find it easy to write without self-medicating. I knew I needed to publish again, as soon as possible, but somehow the prospect of completing (or even seriously beginning) a manuscript seemed to recede in front of me. Just when things were getting really tricky, I came to the attention of whatever board or

Red Pill by Hari
Kunzru is published by
Scribner on September
3 at £14.99

jury awarded the Deuter fellowships. I received a letter from Berlin on pleasingly heavy stationery, inviting me to apply and strongly hinting that I would receive preferential treatment if I did. And so it turned out. I begged for references from the most prestigious writers I knew, and some months later a second letter arrived, informing me that I'd been successful. Three months. Three months of peace.

I ushered the porter out of the room, trying not to make too much eye-contact, noticing the glassy military shine of his shoes as I closed the door. I'd pictured – if I'm honest, possibly only because of the word center in the title – the Deuter Center for Social and Cultural Research as being somewhat like a meditation retreat: a “Center,” as opposed to an “Institute” or an “Academy” or, God forbid, a “Community.” The word implied focus but also a certain hands-off quality: not too many rules or too much unwanted social contact. I was beginning to feel that I might have misunderstood. It was immediately apparent that the culture of the institution was formal and old-fashioned. The porter's good humor was underpinned by a parade-ground stiffness. As he had emerged to greet me, I'd caught a glimpse of some kind of lodge or control room with a desk and a row of monitors, tiled with surveillance images of the house and grounds.

I unpacked my cases and put my toiletries in the bathroom. As I moved around, I could feel my spirits lifting. The view from my window was starkly beautiful. A snow-covered lawn led down to the shore of the lake, where a wrought-iron fence marked the boundary of the property. Beyond it, a few small boats, their decks sheathed in plastic covers, were tied up at a little pier. The surface of the water was gray and gelatinous, close to freezing, undulating rather than rippling in the wind. When I opened the window, I could hear an eerie clinking, incongruously like alpine cow bells. After a moment of confusion, I realized it must be the sound of the aluminum rails and ladders of the boats as they knocked against their moorings.

I thought about some lines from Hölderlin:

*Die Mauern stehn
Sprachlos und kalt, im Winde
Klirren die Fahnen*

The walls stand speechless and cold, the weathervanes clatter in the wind. I was pleased, even a little smug, that these words had sprung so easily to mind. Their presence in my consciousness, so available to be applied to the view from my window, suggested that even before I'd formally begun it, my new project was already under way.

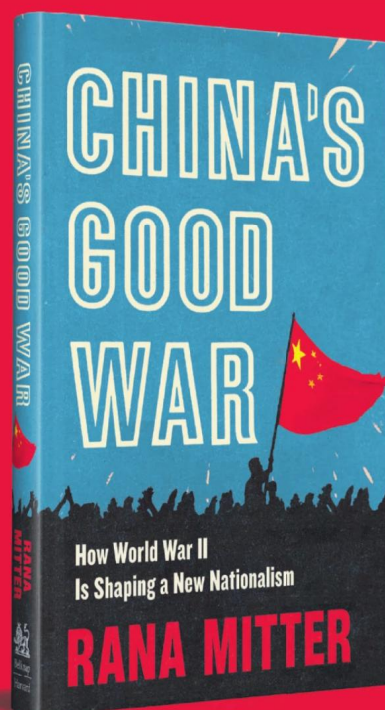
My proposal to the Deuter Center had been titled “The Lyric I.” I had decided to write about the construction of the self in lyric poetry. The topic was a departure for me – I was no poetry scholar – but for some reason it felt like the key to large and urgent questions in my life. I wrote about the lyric as “a textual technology for the organization of affective experience, and a container in which modern selfhood has come to be formulated.” This sounded important and good. I quoted Madame de Staël on the difference between the self in lyric poetry and fiction. “Lyric poetry is expressed in the name of the author himself; no longer is it borne by a character. . . . Lyric poetry recounts nothing, is not confined by the succession of time, nor by the limits of place. It spreads its wings over countries and over ages. It gives duration to that sublime moment in which man raises himself above the pleasures and pains of life.” I noted along with Adorno, that “lyric expression, having escaped from the weight of material existence, should evoke images of a life free from the coercion of reigning practices, of utility, of the relentless pressures of self-preservation.” I agreed with Hegel that “the content is not the object but the subject, the inner world, the mind that considers and feels, that instead of proceeding to action, remains alone with itself as inwardness and that therefore can take as its sole form and final aim the self-expression of subjective life.” ■

“

I had no clue why anyone should care about the arts, let alone be spurred by them to revolution

“Mitter confirms his status as one of the world's leading sinologists in this lucid work.”

—Kevin Rudd,
former Prime Minister of Australia



“This brilliant book is an absolute must-read.”

—Sheila Miyoshi Jager,
author of *Brothers at War*



Harvard University Press

Belknap Press | hup.harvard.edu

There's no there there

Political poetry from Eastern Europe on Facebook

AMELIA GLASER

FOLLOWING THE RE-ELECTION of Belarus's long-time president Alexander Lukashenko on August 9, tens of thousands of Belarusians took to the streets of Minsk to protest a vote that many assume was rigged. Mass arrests and police beatings ensued, and on August 13, the Belarusian poet Dmitry Strotsev posted a poem on Facebook:

my wife and I aren't revolutionaries
non-partisan and unarmed
a dragon's settled in our house
armed and flesh-eating

Hundreds of Strotsev's friends reacted or commented, many by way of literary translation from the poem's original Russian. In the first week alone, the Ukrainian poet Boris Khersonsky posted a translation into Ukrainian, the Chinese poet Shen Haobo and Russian translator Yelizaveta Abushinova rendered it into Chinese, and the German translator Andreas Weihe published a German version.

The protests have little precedent in Belarus, and with Lukashenko clinging to power, their political outcome remains unclear. But the online community of poets and translators that responded to Strotsev's post has been challenging divisions in Eastern Europe since the 2013-14 Euromaidan uprising in Ukraine. The historian Marci Shore dates the start of the Ukrainian protests to a Facebook post by the journalist Mustafa Nayyem: "Who is ready to go out to the Maidan by midnight tonight? 'Likes' don't count". The protesters who gathered in Kyiv's central square were calling for closer ties to the European Union and self-determination in the face of Russian influence. Their efforts led to the ousting of the Ukrainian president, Viktor Yanukovich, but they were also punctuated by bloodshed: from February 18 to February 20, 2014, anti-riot police and snipers killed more than a hundred from their ranks. That spring, Russia annexed Crimea and war erupted in the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine.

As events unfolded in 2014, Strotsev registered his dismay on Facebook from his home in Russia-allied Belarus:

Where'd the guy get his Afghan sadness
Where'd the guy get his Abkhazian sadness
Where'd the guy get his Donbas sadness
Doesn't know
Doesn't know where his brother is
Abel

The poem is identical to another poem Strotsev wrote in 2011, during the First Libyan Civil War, apart from one change: there, "Donbas sadness" had read "Libyan sadness". The original had in turn alluded to Mikhail Svetlov's neo-romantic ballad "Granada" (1926), which asks, "Where'd the guy get his Spanish sadness". Svetlov, a Jewish poet from Soviet Ukraine, tells in Russian laced with Ukrainian of a Ukrainian Red Army soldier who dreams of freeing the world.

A poem's formal and historical references are the stuff of literary analysis, and Facebook, for all its faults (its unethical handling of user data, opaque political advertising, and reluctance to monitor content, to name a few) can animate this process. Strotsev's Donbas poem evokes, darkly, Russia's wars from the Soviet campaign in Afghanistan in the 1980s to the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. Yet it also captures how East European writers, translators and readers have turned online poetry into a means of exchange. When, in 2019, Strotsev marked five



Street art depicting the poet Ivan Franko, Kyiv, 2014

years of the war by posting the poet Natalia Belchenko's Ukrainian translation of his poem, another friend wrote about Belchenko's use of the word "affliction" (*zhurba*) to translate Strotsev's "sadness" (*grust*): "It's as if they fall on different sides of the front line".

Much like the samizdat, or self-publishing, counterculture that thrived among dissidents in the late Soviet period, the Euromaidan turned poetry and art into means of speaking truth to power. Facebook's news feed, comment threads and sheer mass of users have broadened the reach of such protests, facilitating what the Russian expatriate poet Dmitry Kuzmin has called the "kaleidoscopic growth" of poetic networks. Two welcome by-products of this growth have been the appearance of new translations of poetry among East European languages. But these online exchanges are not without their risks. Criticism of the Kremlin on the Russian social media sites VKontakte and Odnoklassniki has led to fines and arrest, and Facebook members are similarly vulnerable to political retaliation. Yet individual writers across the region's national and political divides continue to use the platform.

If the Donbas war has driven a wedge between Ukraine and Russia, it has also emboldened literary collaborations. Whereas English-language poets tend to distribute only published work on Facebook, writers from Eastern Europe regularly post drafts, solicit suggestions and translate each other in the comment field. The proximity of Slavic languages, augmented by translation technology, subverts the battle lines drawn by state politics. If Russian remains the lingua franca of the region and English the lingua franca of Facebook itself, these poets question such hierarchies by conversing in both their native languages and the languages from which they translate.

The poet and journalist Ilya Kiva, who left Donbas for Kyiv in 2014, frequently posts poems and translations in both Russian and Ukrainian. Although she recently shifted to Ukrainian with her widely praised book *First Page of Winter* (*Persha storinka zymy*, 2019), she continues to make a case for Russian being a legitimate language of Ukraine. On the sixth anniversary of the massacre of Euromaidan protesters, Kiva reposted a poem she had written in 2014 in both its original Russian and her own translation into Ukrainian. The couplets articulate a young generation's loss of faith:

“Ukraine, a historically multilingual country, became mired in language politics during the Euromaidan

This coffin is yours, little boy, yours, don't be afraid,
lie down,
Squeezing in the palm of your hand a bullet called
life...

We won't forget you, believe it, believe it, believe...
Belief drips with blood to the ground from inside
your sleeve

Kiva's post commemorating the victims encouraged readers to do the same. "The fallen heroes have immortalized this turning point in Ukrainian history and Ukrainian civilization", one friend wrote in the comment field.

The perception that Ukraine is, or should be, a province of Russia has driven Kremlin foreign policy since the 1990s. Translators, however, often argue the opposite by highlighting rhythmic, idiomatic and historical differences between the two languages. As the Ukrainian editor Yuri Zavadsky told Kiva in an interview, "We are not trying ... to recreate what is there in the original. We are trying to push a few cultures to interact with one another. Translation is the provocation to share and to search". In 2018, Zavadsky released a collection of Kuzmin's poems, *Blankets Are Not Included* (*Kovdry ne peredbacheni*), and the Kyiv publisher Dukh i litera is now preparing an anthology of Strotsev's verse in Ukrainian, Russian, Belarusian and Polish.

Ukraine, a historically multilingual country, became mired in language politics during the Euromaidan, with some pushing for a Ukrainian-only platform and others articulating the importance of the country's Russian-speaking population. Boris Khersonsky, who lives in multicultural Odessa, had long responded to such debates by combining Jewish and Christian iconography in his Russian-language verse. After 2014, however, he began speaking publicly in Ukrainian and experimenting with Ukrainian-language poetry. A Ukrainian-language poem that he posted to Facebook in 2018 describes the Russian invasion:

The devils have come and they say "we are angels".
The henchmen have come and they say "we are brothers".

They say "we have come from the world",

But in fact they have come from the darkness.

The proximity of readers' comments to the original post has integrated their responses into the text. "Painful", wrote one Facebook friend of the subject matter. "We have a new genius of Ukrainian poetry", another noted, observing Khersonsky's shift away from Russian.

In 2019, five years after leaving Russia in response to its military actions in Ukraine, Dmitry Kuzmin posted his own poetic reply to a bizarre manifesto by Vladislav Surkov, Putin's former chief of staff. In the manifesto, "Putin's Long State", Surkov makes the medieval claim that Russians thrive under strong leaders and reinforced borders, and welcomes what he predicts will be a century of Putinism. Kuzmin's poem interprets Surkov's isolationist vision as a "fisheye lens" that obscures the world beyond Russia. Yet when the Russian-American poet Philip Nikolayev posted his English translation in the comment field, Kuzmin asked whether "a foreign reader might comprehend what this buzz is about". Following a public exchange of references and edits, Nikolayev published the translation in the US journal *Matter Monthly*. The finished product contains lines that eerily connect Kuzmin's poem with American anxieties under Donald Trump: "Everything is dark abroad there's no there there".

This poetry may indeed be political, but it presents an alternative to the grandstanding and disinformation that plague social media worldwide. The poets who share their work online expose the layers of history, emotion and language that keep cultures intertwined. In an Eastern Europe still scarred by borders and front lines, their verse celebrates the power of language to transcend those divisions and captures the political pulse of the moment. As one group of Odessans told protesters in Minsk in a video that circulated on social media last month: "Odessa is with you. Ukraine is with you. Long live Belarus". ■

Amelia Glaser is a scholar and translator of Russian, Ukrainian and Yiddish literature at the University of California, San Diego, and the author of the forthcoming *Songs in Dark Times*

City of hidden abundance

An exercise in exhuming the past and probing the lost

OLIVER BALCH

SHADOW CITY

A woman walks Kabul

TARAN KHAN

272pp. Chatto and Windus. £14.99.

ALL NEW ARRIVALS IN KABUL are strongly advised not to walk the streets. It is unsafe and, after decades of war and “violent peace”, largely unrewarding. Palaces, monuments, temples, forts: most traces of this ancient city lie in ruins.

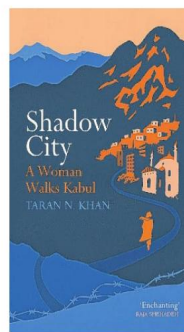
To her credit, Taran Khan ignores the warnings of officialdom. Her highly personal, nuanced account of Kabul draws on visits to the Afghan capital as a media trainer between 2005 and 2013.

It contains vivid descriptions of this “city of hidden abundance”, with its busy bazaars and dusty side streets, but *Shadow City* is no conventional travel book. For Khan gives us a Kabul of the imagination: it is the city that *was*, less the city that *is*, that fascinates her. Her perambulations represent a form of “bipedal archaeology”, an exercise in exhuming the past and probing the lost.

She is not alone in her quest. An intriguing cast of informants – her driver Abdullah, her colleague Khalid, her ex-housemate Dr Sahab – are on hand to open doors and offer up clues. So too, most intriguingly, is her poet grandfather, Baba, whose deep immersion in Persian literature enables him to “discern the layers of Kabul’s streets” even though he has lived in India all his life. Despite claims to wandering at whim, Khan’s “routes of discovery” actually smack of considerable deliberation. There are entire chapters devoted to such tangible subjects as graveyards, cinemas and bookshops, for instance. Structurally, this pays off: in each case, Khan discovers a portal into Kabul’s shadowy past, be it through tombstone engravings, old propagandist showreels or dust-covered ancient texts.

To see the city completely, Khan argues, “we must learn to see what is missing”. This is true of all ancient cities, of course – temples fall; Starbucks outlets rise – but in few places is it more true than in Kabul, an ancient capital twisted out of shape first by a relentless conflict with the Soviets, then by a bloody civil war, then by the Taliban, and finally by the bombs and aid budgets of the Allied coalition.

At times, *Shadow City* edges towards nostalgia.



Every time it does, however, Khan brings us back to the unhealed wounds of the city’s past. According to one estimate, three-fifths of Kabulis exhibit the effects of trauma. This is an “amnesiac city”, a place desperate to forget. But forgetting is a tricky business, a fact Khan brilliantly illustrates in her sympathetic depiction of today’s walking wounded. The most alarming cases are to be found in Kabul’s asylums, where, in the “cruel hierarchy of vulnerability”, they are left to be forgotten. Similarly sidelined are the city’s drug addicts, who congregate “in the crevices of the city” in an opioid haze. Less dramatic but no less sad is Kabul’s incessant flow of refugees and returnees, for whom the turmoil of absence and longing, hope and despair, never ceases.

Amid all this darkness, however, are lustrous chinks of light. There is a joyous chapter on weddings, for example, complete with beauty parlour gossip and dancefloor gaiety. During one visit to a salon, Khan describes the face of a bride-to-be slowly disappearing under coats of make-up and glitter: “each step another layer between her and the onlookers, like veils that concealed even as they revealed. This was the face that would live in her memories and her wedding photographs”. But the book’s real hope lies in the everyday heroes Khan meets, such as the archaeologist dedicated to charting Kabul’s derided Buddhist past, or the film archivists who risked all to hoodwink the Taliban, or the lone psychiatrist with the Sisyphean task of caring for the city’s mentally ill. It is easy to cast Kabul as a tragic mess of a metropolis, but Khan illuminates its life-affirming humanity. ■

Oliver Balch is a British writer and journalist currently based in Portugal. He is the author of travelogues about Latin America, India and the Welsh borders

‘Highly original, deeply moving and perceptive’

SAUL DAVID, *Sunday Telegraph*

‘A truly significant contribution’

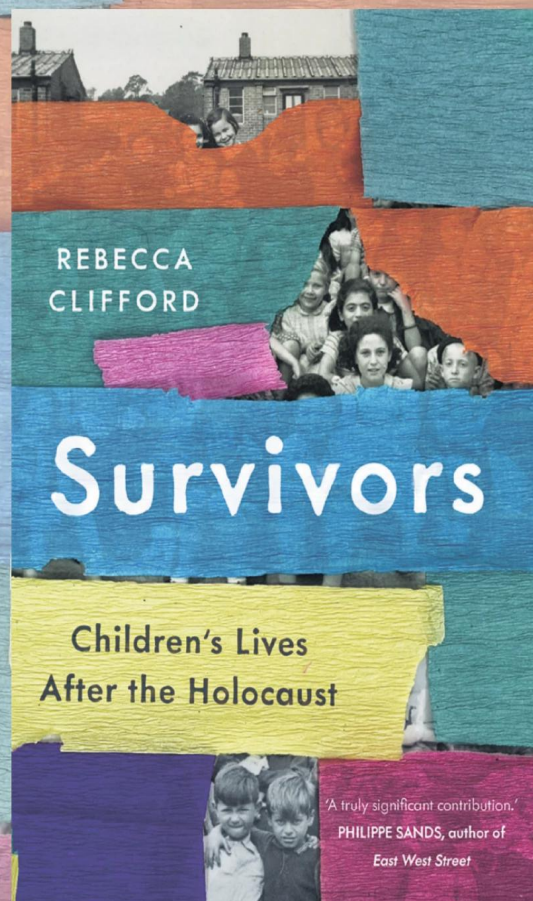
PHILIPPE SANDS, author of *East West Street*

‘[An] extraordinary book’

MICHAEL O’LOUGHLIN, *Irish Times*

OUT NOW IN HARDBACK

Yale



‘A truly significant contribution.’
PHILIPPE SANDS, author of
East West Street



Is the best yet to come?

Creative potential in the relationship between the book and digital platforms

HAL JENSEN

WHEN NOVELS WERE BOOKS

JORDAN ALEXANDER STEIN

272pp. Harvard University Press. £31.95
(US \$39.95).

THE SECRET LIFE OF BOOKS

Why they mean more than words

TOM MOLE

256pp. Elliott and Thompson. £11.99.

FOR MUCH OF THE POSTWAR PERIOD, literary criticism and textual studies have remained worlds apart. W. W. Greg's essay "The Rationale of Copy-Text", a landmark of New Bibliography, appeared in 1950, sandwiched between the publication of *The Well Wrought Urn* (1947) and *The Verbal Icon* (1954), two classics of New Criticism. But the giants of bibliography and criticism had nothing to say to one another and, it would seem, no common language. A few prophetic voices – Walter J. Ong, Marshall McLuhan, Eric A. Havelock – drew attention to the profound connections between media technology and the creation and reception of literature. Their news, although not unheralded, was perhaps too much to take in. Two other contrasting classics of that era have stayed in print, which means the problem hasn't gone away: Ian Watt's *The Rise of the Novel* (1957, reprinted in 2015) and Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin's *L'Apparition du livre* (1958, translated as *The Coming of the Book*, reprinted in 2010). The first, a study of the origins of realism in the art of fiction, can be read without any knowledge of the second, a study of the impact of printing in Europe from 1450 to 1800.

Thankfully, and finally, there are signs that this cultural distancing has had its day. The terminology hasn't settled down yet. "Book", "work" and "text" are still battle-scarred from the great Theory Wars at the end of the twentieth century. But the signs of recovery are encouraging: textual scholars, editorial theorists and historians of the book are all helping, in positive ways, to reshape literary studies. What was once regarded as a preliminary or peripheral task of only specialist interest (often condensed, in paperback editions, to a short and perfunctory "Note on the Text") now finds itself increasingly at

the centre of history and criticism.

Here are two very different reports from the current scene: one, a scholarly study of the eighteenth-century novel; the other, an informal primer on the book as a physical thing in the world. It is a sign of vigorous growth in the field that both books are written by young academics, brimful of enthusiasm.

When Novels Were Books is an engaging and thought-provoking debut from Jordan Alexander Stein, Associate Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Fordham University in New York. Simply put, Stein's study "corrects" *The Rise of the Novel* by means of *The Coming of the Book*, or as Stein himself puts it: "the history of the novel cannot be considered independently of the material conditions under which those novels were printed and read".

In four short chapters, Stein hopes to rescue the eighteenth-century novel from the isolation chamber of "internal" genre criticism ("formal features of plot, setting, and characterization") and return it to its real, much messier, "external" contexts, specifically developments in book format and changes in printing practice. In this version, the novel, in its familiar nineteenth-century manifestation, "rises" much less distinctly from within the eighteenth-century literary scene, in particular sharing much in common – in appearance and purpose – with contemporary religious writings.

Stein's first chapter looks at character, a feature supposedly "owned" by the novel form, and finds that the confessional narratives of Reformed Protestants in the seventeenth century, which circulated rapidly in manuscript, convey in their pious and vulnerable self-representations a remarkable resemblance to early portrayals of character in secular novels.

The second chapter deals with similarities between two supposedly originary novels – *The Pilgrim's Progress* and *Robinson Crusoe* – and finds continuities, both formal and material, between these works and early popular devotional "steady-sellers" (usually produced as little duodecimo "bricks"). Stein wants us to see these two influential works as transitional; different, but not yet self-evidently novels.

Chapter Three looks more broadly at text-networks: it argues that features often seen as distinctive of the novel's textual existence – abridgement, anthologization, translation, commercial success – can be found in devotional works, too. His example, compared nicely with Richardson's *Pamela*, is *The*

Illustration of *The Pilgrim's Progress*

Life of David Brainerd, a devotional biography by Jonathan Edwards, which went through all these processes of adaptation and extraction with notable success.

The fourth chapter brings us finally to the emergence of the novel as a distinct element in the marketplace in the late eighteenth century. Here, Stein urges us to avoid seeing this as simply a triumph of the novel's self-confidence. Instead, he looks at how religious institutions subtracted themselves from the commercial London publishing market, funding themselves and making use of printing-house job work for pamphlets and tracts, in order to better reach and influence their target audiences. At this point, clearly – and textually – separated, the novel and religion could freely regard each other with disdain and assert their individuality.

By the early nineteenth century, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, which had resembled the devotional "brick" steady-seller on first appearance, was repackaged as a novel. And so the nineteenth century began to rewrite the eighteenth-century literary scene as a muddled but eventually triumphant prelude to the full Victorian achievement. Looked at from a textual perspective, the rise of the novel was a product of the nineteenth-century critic, not a feature of the eighteenth-century book.

Stein's book is made up of interesting, well-documented and compelling instances, but it is, as he admits, a very narrow selection from which to draw any general conclusions. There is a problem, too, with the title. Novels, of course, didn't stop being books in the Victorian era or, despite the best efforts of New Criticism, in our own era. In fact, the most exciting discovery of Stein's book does not lie in the details of his examples, interesting though they are; it lies in his revelation of a wonderfully evoked textual scene far more varied and unusual than we familiarly imagine. The novel, if we read beyond Stein's own conclusions, is not really that useful a category when dealing with the variety and hybridity of eighteenth-century writing. Perhaps what we need, if we are going to fuse the history of literature with the history of the book, is not a polite and scrupulous correction of the familiar story, but a total rewrite.

What it means to see a book as a book, as a physical and social object with its own significant properties and meanings, is the subject of *The Secret Life of Books* by Tom Mole. Here is another misleading title, for the life of books described by Mole is not "secret" at all; instead, it is so commonplace that it goes generally unremarked. Overlooked, you might say, but not secret.

In eight little chapters, broken into segments a page or two long, Mole describes the physical advantages and disadvantages of books, along with the objects that often accompany them (bookmarks, pens, even scissors) then widens his scope to cover the way we use books to express our identity (or to parade our credentials) and the way they bring us into a relationship with others (from inscriptions and annotations to auction houses and book clubs).

Branching out further still to look at the book in the world, Mole offers a brief survey of libraries – their scale, management and use – as well as the social implications of large national institutions. Two final chapters bring us into contact with more immediate concerns arising from the new(ish) digital landscape.

The "end of the book" has been threatened and promised for decades now. Mole adopts a reasonable and balanced stance – historically, a new medium usually causes its "rivals" to develop rather than disappear – but it is clear, at times, that he feels the need to defend the long-lived codex against digital encroachment. For instance, he sees the multi-functionality of our devices as a risk to our attention, when this ability to flit between text, website, library catalogue and online shop, is just as often a great help to the reader, let alone the researcher, and may well – who knows? – provide opportunities in future for narrative creativity.

Mole feels that digital goes hand in hand with a

Hal Jensen is writing a book about the Oxford Professors of Poetry

quick-glance era, yet his own book is built purposely on the quick-glance principle, as are the many and endless voguish histories “in 100 objects”. And the same digital age that caters for short attention spans has also brought us sustained and concentrated “box-set” viewing in the form of television series such as *The West Wing* and *The Wire*. In the main, however, Mole is sensibly even-handed. Strangely, he doesn’t appear to credit the rest of us with this capability: “while some readers are happy for their books to migrate to digital environments, others are becoming more concerned with their existence as material things”. Most of us, surely, adopt a functional mix of digital and paper, sometimes – as with dictionaries, perhaps – using an online resource for research and a well-printed codex for pleasure.

One area where Mole and Stein might usefully overlap is the editing of literary works. Editors and publishers have a great opportunity to test and explore the relative advantages of printed books (in a variety of formats) and digital resources and archives.

There is much to enjoy in *The Secret Life of Books*. Mole is good, for instance, on Victorian railway reading – *Raped on the Railway* (1894) is new to me – and he effectively highlights the material foundations of production and usage that underpin the so-called virtual environment. Potted histories of writing surfaces, say, or library classification systems are ludicrously brief, at barely a few hundred words, but Mole’s information is accurate and up to date.

There is a major stumbling block. Mole is Professor of English and Book History at the University of Edinburgh, where he heads a thriving Centre for the History of the Book; yet *The Secret Life of Books* is pitched at a level far below that of a first year undergraduate.

The prose, in both sentence structure and idiom, is simplified to the point of banality. Too often, Mole’s insights are let down by trite examples (big glossy books are status symbols; academics can disappear behind piles of books; some people are happy to deface books, others aren’t). Mole employs a jokey-friendly tone throughout which more than once comes off as smirking (don’t leave erotica lying around for the babysitter to see!). Potentially entertaining anecdotes fall flat for want of extra effort: Mole’s copy of *Middlemarch* contains a massive printing error but Mole makes no attempt to enliven the observation about printing by linking it, imaginatively, to the novel in hand. It’s just a badly printed book.

At the end of his last chapter, Mole finds space for a wonderful contrast between the Creation of the Old Testament, where the heavens are seen by Isaiah as an unrolled scroll, ready perhaps to be rolled up by God at any moment, and the Creation of Dante’s *Commedia*, where the disordered fragments – the scattered leaves – of existence are made intelligible and comprehended within the covers of a book. If only Mole had started here.

It is time to brush the dust off Ong, McLuhan and Havelock, those bold pioneers of textual thinking.

“
It is time to
brush the dust
off Ong,
McLuhan and
Havelock, those
bold pioneers
of textual
thinking

After so many years of almost total domination by the book, it is about time we asked whether it performs all its tasks with equal success.

It is clear, for instance, that these two new books don’t quite work, as books. Stein’s is very nicely produced by Harvard University Press, but it contains fifty pages of closely printed endnotes, requiring frequent and awkward finger-and-thumb manoeuvres. Keyed into a digital text, these notes would be far more manageable. A digital version would also allow for more pictorial evidence of the eighteenth-century book formats so central to Stein’s argument, although the twenty monochrome illustrations are a welcome addition to the book as it stands.

Mole’s more populist book, on the other hand, attempts to attract readers with small pages and short lines of print, along with flouncy dropped capitals, but it is cheaply printed and not – as was clearly intended – a desirable object in itself. There are but three illustrations, in a book which cries out for visual reinforcement of its claims. And these three illustrations are saturated with black ink and far too small to be of use. The third image, of a triptych ranging 2.5 metres by 5 metres, is reproduced at the size of a cigarette packet.

A bit of pressure on books to take more seriously their bookish qualities would be no bad thing. Far from causing or inciting the death of the book, digital platforms look capable of giving a life-saving jolt to the system. You might even wonder, as far as the printed book is concerned, if the best is yet to come. ■

Circulate before publishing

Nineteenth-century authors’
multifaceted strategies

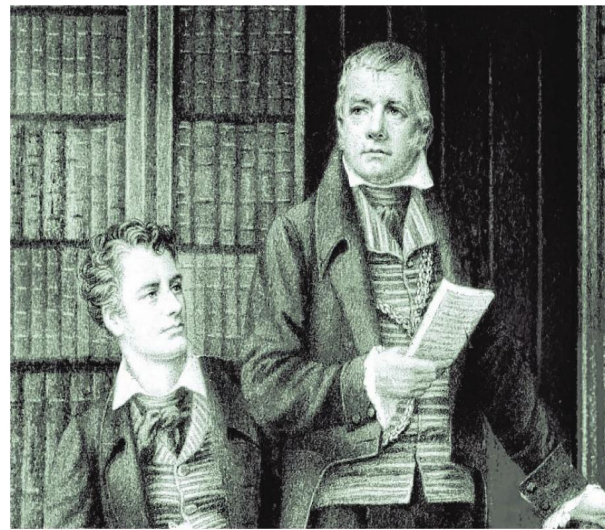
KATHRYN SUTHERLAND

**LITERARY MANUSCRIPT CULTURE IN
ROMANTIC BRITAIN**
MICHELLE LEVY

300pp. Edinburgh University Press. £80.

MICHELLE LEVY CONCLUDES her ambitious study *Literary Manuscript Culture in Romantic Britain* with a qualification: print and script were only two parts of a wider media ecology that, in the early nineteenth century, included visual and oral modes of communication, such as cartoon and caricature; or recitation and reading aloud. Reading aloud possibly explains how Walter Scott could incorporate an imitation of Coleridge’s then-unpublished “Christabel” in his published romance *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*. A more remarkable feat of textual recovery is implied in Jane Austen’s only half-comic remark that her friend Martha Lloyd should not be allowed to read again the manuscript of “First Impressions” (an early version of *Pride and Prejudice*) because “she means to publish it from Memory, & one more perusal must enable her to do it”.

Levy aims to redress a misconception: that by the late eighteenth century the semi-public circulation of works in handwritten form had been ousted by print. On the contrary, for several major writers, the expanding market for print led to new hybrid forms in which print and manuscript offered complementary or complexly entwined methods of dissemination.



Nineteenth-century
lithograph of Lord
Byron and Sir Walter
Scott

tion. Byron early on printed manuscripts for private circulation; William Blake handcrafted plates that only became readable once printed. Through shifts across multiple published editions, Charlotte Smith manipulated the printed page as an unstable space for her self-communing poetic voice; and Dorothy Wordsworth introduced prompts for print into handwritten journals long considered marginal supports for her brother’s greater work. As witnessed by the digital explosion of the twenty-first century, there are multiple points of intersection and cross-contamination between old and new media. In every age, literary writers have developed fruitful strategies for outwitting and exploiting the available technologies.

Statistics for manuscript circulation among male poets of the period are instructive. More than half of Byron’s short poems were unprinted in his lifetime; two-thirds of Keats’s poems remained in manuscript at his early death. In each case, handwritten versions were not sealed from view but shared with a select (confidential) readership: John Murray, his publisher, acting as trusted gatekeeper for Byron’s risky verses; Keats circulating his own poetry in journal letters or as inscriptions in commonplace

books. Such evidence counterbalances any prejudicial assumption that coterie habits were the belated recourse of over-modest female practitioners. Although restricted manuscript publication functioned as a sympathetic gauge of opinion, in many instances it did not represent an obvious division between amateur and professional writing, as the case of Anna Laetitia Barbauld makes clear. Comparisons between Smith and Wordsworth, and between Barbauld and Byron, are unexpected and illuminating. The suggestion that Austen, however, at the height of her professional career, might invest sustained effort in a novel (the twelve chapters, or 24,000 words, of the unfinished *Sanditon*) “not necessarily written with print in mind” stretches credibility.

In these author-centric studies, what is really at issue is the role manuscript played as a witness to sociability and the diverse communities through which a literary work might circulate. It is a question of the conditions for reception, and networks of distribution, rather than composition – though in some cases, Byron’s, for example, creative processes are implicated in manuscript’s multiple fashioning. But do these practices amount to a distinctly Romantic phenomenon, as Levy seems to suggest, or are they recoverable from other periods? This is the first age from which manuscript drafts of British novelists and poets have survived in sufficient quantity for us to be able to inspect and compare text in its evolution and dissemination, its messy origins, fair-copy and press-copy states. Some of the practices Levy examines are detectable, too, in later writers: in Virginia Woolf, Robert Frost, J. R. R. Tolkien and Philip Larkin, who variously home-crafted manuscripts in youth, published a collection of which only two copies were printed, shared confidential handwritten (or typewritten) forms in adult life, and put revised versions of privately circulated work into print.

A final chapter covers a range of issues – from the rise of an interest in the history of writing and a collectors’ market for autographs to manuscript as the substrate for twentieth-century print-based editorial theory and practice, and the recent digital remediation of written forms. The implication is clear: the Romantic period has given us instances and models for esteeming, questioning, combining and distinguishing different media that remain vital and relevant today. ■

Kathryn Sutherland is
Senior Research Fellow
at St Anne’s College,
Oxford, and the editor
of Jane Austen’s
Fiction Manuscripts, 5
vols, 2018



Out in the cold

The wasteful exclusion of women from roles in the global economy

JANE ROBINSON

DOUBLE LIVES

A history of working motherhood in modern Britain

HELEN MCCARTHY

560pp. Bloomsbury. £30.

THE DOUBLE X ECONOMY

The epic potential of empowering women

LINDA SCOTT

384pp. Faber. £18.99.

AT A RECENT EVENT celebrating the centenary of women working in law, I overheard someone at a neighbouring table ask a distinguished London solicitor how easy it had been for her to join the professional elite. Not easy at all. She had had to be persuaded to apply for a senior partnership, feeling an impostor despite decades of experience. "Women still have to be asked to dance", she said, a little wistfully. Plenty of working mothers today will recognize that feeling of being a guest at their own party - or even at the wrong party altogether, at work when they should be with the family and vice versa.

This is a dislocation Helen McCarthy knows well. At the heart of her thoughtful and impeccably researched book is the dual conceit of women not only living double lives as working mothers, split between home and office, but also as opposing societal ciphers. From the Victorian period onwards they have been cast as heroes and villains at once; home-makers and home-breakers, sponging dependents and strident breadwinners, models and transgressors. McCarthy moves us through a century and a half of commentary on British working women to illustrate their quest to "become authors of their own lives" and so resolve the tensions between experience and expectation.

Double Lives: A history of working motherhood in modern Britain can get sluggish: there are 537 pages to get through, including more than a hundred pages of notes, and McCarthy sometimes loses sight of her subject in crowds of single women and childless wives. But persevering is well worthwhile. This is more than a history book; it's a narrative of paradox

and compromise and of the struggle to reconcile independence with obedience. Shifting populations of sweated labourers, war workers, piece-workers, career women and part-timers come and go, some of them longing to spend time with their children, others desperate to be out and earning, others yearning for both. As the years go by, Commissions, Inquiries and legislation attempt to address the conditions of women working away from home, and stout-hearted social reformers, most of them women, pop up briskly now and then (too briskly for me) to make studies and recommendations.

There are some striking set pieces, gathered from Mass Observation exercises, newspaper features and surveys. We meet the lonely Birmingham woman who, sometime in the 1930s, was forced to give up a job she loved because of marriage (to a policeman):

I missed the company, the girls, the laughter ... I used to walk up to Sparkbrook and see my husband on point duty - give him a sweet ... then come back ... I would have loved to have gone to work but my husband said the day you go to work is the day I stop at home so that was that.

Expediency changes expectations. McCarthy makes the point that the daily reality of female factory workers in the mid-nineteenth century ran parallel to the idealistic social norm of the "angel in the house", who fulfilled her domestic duty by perching in a drawing room to wait for an eligible suitor to emerge from behind the chaise longue and lead her to her destiny (which was to reprise her duties in his home). This sort of doublethink was only possible if those who could afford to be angels kept within their own pretty bubbles, while those who needed a job to survive - and to keep the economy going - got on with things behind the scenes.

All those off-stage females toiling at their needles or hammering out chain-links presented a problem, however. Overworked mothers, so popular thinking went, produced suboptimal children, and suboptimal children would not grow up to build empires or win wars. State intervention was necessary after the First World War to ensure that mothers invested their energies in bringing up robust offspring, or that children were better cared for while their mothers were at work. Under the provisions of the Maternity and Child Welfare Act of 1918, for example, local authorities routinely offered clinics, day nurseries and health visitors to their local communities for the

Look and Learn
illustration of women working as file cutters for Cammell Laird marine engineers, 1917

“Overworked mothers, so popular thinking went, produced suboptimal children, and suboptimal children would not grow up to build empires or win wars

Jane Robinson is the author of *Ladies Can't Climb Ladders: The pioneering adventures of the first professional women*, published earlier this year. Her next book is a short biography of Josephine Butler, due to be published this autumn

first time. While both world wars offered previously unimaginable opportunities for working women, however, socio-economic pressures afterwards - most obviously in the form of returning soldiers in need of jobs - meant that many doors were not only closed but slammed shut again.

In the 1970s, the cult of the Superwoman, laid at the kitten-heeled feet of Shirley Conran, led to yet more stress. Famously, she advised that "life is too short to stuff a mushroom", and tried to show how balancing family duty and "me-time" was perfectly achievable with the right attitude. And so we found ourselves thinking: if I were better organized, or my children were more patient, or my husband were willing to wrestle with the Hoover occasionally, or I had an understanding boss, then I, too, could have it all. Why can't I make it happen?

Linda Scott has the answer. You can't make it happen because you are institutionally impotent. *The Double X Economy: The epic potential of empowering women*, combines a searing analysis of gender bias in the global economy with an agenda for reform. The book's title is a term Scott coined some years ago to describe the systemic misogyny woven into the world's financial fabric, and the latent force implicit in the productivity and spending power of more than half the human race. Her argument is that women are a squandered resource; investment in their individual and collective futures will lead to peace and prosperity for us all, but it needs to happen now.

Scott knows her stuff. She is a prominent thinker and doer in the field of international development for women; an academic, consultant, adviser and field-worker, who founded the Power Shift Forum for Women in the World Economy in 2013 and is collaborating with various multinationals. She is not a historian. Where McCarthy gently sits her readers in front of a window and invites them to ponder the long view, Scott angrily holds up a mirror (no time to sit down) and challenges us to change what we see. According to Scott, the sort of slow progress towards choice outlined by McCarthy is an illusion. Behind the façade is a stinking, parasitical economy where men are still the hunter-gatherers, a fiscal band of brothers using sexist language and coercive control to exclude women. After learning that men currently hold 99 per cent of the procurement contracts in the world and consequently control 99 per cent of international trade, and that they own 80 per cent of food-producing land and, in many countries, own women as well, I was reminded of the economist Margaret Miller's comment in 1927 that, "women [are] as effectively barred from earning a livelihood ... as if femininity were an incurable disease with which they had been born". Nearly a century on, economic disadvantage can still be a question of genetics.

Like all effective activists, Scott offers solutions as well as outrage. She and a team recently set up a project to supply sanitary pads to young women in Ghana. Why is this an economic issue? Because without proper protection, one's menstrual status becomes a public matter. They are thus deprived of self-possession - which in turn deprives them of the self-direction and self-confidence necessary for prosperity. Not to mention that girls must miss several days of school each month, which severely limits their education, and risk their health by using hastily washed rags. In certain cultures, Scott reminds us, menarche signals young women's "ripeness" to men who believe it their right (or duty) to rape them, or to contract a remunerative marriage. This erodes the girls' dignity and opportunities until, economically and socially, they simply disappear.

The Double X Economy is vital in both senses of the word: lively and essential. I found myself identifying with Scott when she encountered the rank sexism of a group of male economists at a meeting in Singapore. "I now felt I had been living for years in a warm bath of mutual support and was suddenly left standing, cold and shaking, without a towel." Good history - such as McCarthy's *Double Lives* - can be like a warm bath: stimulating, even fortifying. Scott's book is an altogether different proposition: it should leave one feeling shocked and shaking with rage. ■

Born too soon

Prematurity's humane science

JULIA BUENO

EARLY

An intimate history of premature birth and what it teaches us about being human

SARAH DIGREGORIO

368pp. Fourth Estate. £16.99.



THREE MONTHS BEFORE HER DUE DATE, Sarah DiGregorio's daughter had to be delivered by C-section. She weighed 1 lb 13 oz (just over 800g). Reflecting on her fraught time in theatre, DiGregorio writes "What strikes me now is how much human ingenuity and skill and technology was marshaled there to save her, and how utterly helpless and, in a way, incidental, she and I both were". As an established journalist with a new, personal subject to explore, she navigates her insider-researcher status carefully - this is less a memoir than it is a polemic. DiGregorio swiftly learns how premature birth propels a newborn into a liminal state that no mother can prepare for, neither gestating in a body as it should, nor quite "gestating" among a battery of neonatal technologies.

Literature about motherhood continues to push into the less palatable aspects: post-partum depression, the debilitating visceral legacies of birth as well as the allied agonies of pregnancy loss and infertility. And now, in the wake of Francesca Segal's *Motherhood* and Olivia Gordon's *The First Breath*, both published last year, the gruelling phenomena of premature birth are rightfully illuminated: 15 million babies are born too soon each year, with the US having the highest rate in the industrialized world. In *Early* DiGregorio confronts the gravest of questions: who do we - as a society - think deserves to be here?

In an early chapter exploring the story of incubation - the most obvious and earliest neonatal technology - we meet the charismatic showman Martin Couney, whose "preemies" in glass-fronted boxes sat beside gondola rides and high-wire acts on Coney Island, for the fee-paying public of the early 1900s to marvel at. In one of the many wonderful fruits of research, we learn that Archibald Leach helped to drum up business for Couney's proto-NICU (neonatal intensive care unit), before heading to Hollywood as Cary Grant. Couney was elastic with the truth of his medical credentials, but he saved thousands of lives nonetheless.

The most common modern incubator is known as a "Giraffe". Each one of its internal scales is finely calibrated by General Electric according to the NICU in which it will reside: the force of gravity differs by latitude and altitude, albeit by grams, and this will matter very much if you arrive in the world too light to be weighed in kilograms. The level of research and development that has gone into the Giraffe is astounding - it is, DiGregorio shows, "a manifestation of human experience" as opposed to the harsh piece of technology it can seem to traumatized parents. Research into future incubation in a "biobag" is pondered too, with some medical ethicists, including Elizabeth Chloe Romanis, suggesting this would create a new type

The feet of Amillia Sonja Taylor, born at twenty-one weeks and six days, Florida, 2006

Julia Bueno is a practising psychotherapist and the author of The Brink of Being: Talking about miscarriage, which was reissued in paperback earlier this year

of patient: neither foetus nor baby, but rather a "gestateling". While the NICU helps preemies with functions they can't do alone, such "artificial womb technology", Romanis argues, treats them as though they have yet to be born.

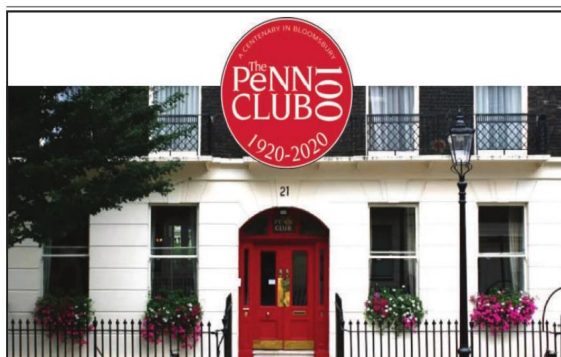
For the past thirty years or so, twenty-four weeks has been considered the limit of "viability" (reflected in the UK's change in 1993 of the legal definition of "stillbirth" from twenty-eight to twenty-four weeks). But now, more babies are surviving before this threshold: Sweden, Japan and Iowa City are exceptionally pioneering but plenty of other places are not: "Some hospitals have a zero percent survival rate for 22-babies". In the US, around 5,000 babies are born at twenty-two and twenty-three weeks every year, yet there is no consensus on whether to actively treat them in a NICU or to - euphemistically - give them "comfort care".

The causes of prematurity are myriad, nuanced and ripe for plentiful research. Established risk factors include uterine abnormalities, problems with the placenta and infections. Meanwhile, data shows how the event discriminates. Black American women give birth prematurely around 50 per cent more often than other American women, and are three times more likely than white women to give birth before thirty-two weeks. In turn, this means that Black children in the US are more than twice as likely to die before they turn one, compared with white children. A thought-provoking chapter entitled "Racism Causes Preterm Birth" offers a devastating look at how Black women are treated differently, dismissively, and even aggressively, in work and health care settings. DiGregorio's focus on Mississippi - the state with the highest preterm birth - serves to unpick the dire "double jeopardy" of being Black and a woman in the US healthcare system.

A coda homes in on a particular prenatal care group for high-risk pregnancies in the BronxCare Hospital, in New York City: the group seems to have a remarkable effect in improving outcomes - especially among those groups of women suffering the most chronic stress, and the highest likelihood of mistreatment by the medical system. But this also provokes other vital questions raised by DiGregorio, including, "How can we stop pretending that childbirth and child-rearing is something individuals can do alone?" ■

CLASSIFIED

ACCOMMODATION



CENTRAL LONDON:

Friendly B&B in historic Bloomsbury. Rooms from £84 to include full English breakfast. Free wireless access. Close to British Museum and Library. Direct Underground to Heathrow and Kings X for Eurostar. Quiet, safe, secure, ideal for those travelling alone.

The Penn Club
21 Bedford Place, London, WC1B 5JJ
+44 (0) 20 7636 4718 office@pennclub.co.uk
www.pennclub.co.uk

JOURNALS & PERIODICALS

Booklaunch
www.booklaunch.london

Reach 50,000+ serious print readers by showcasing your book in Booklaunch—or seek our guidance in publishing your manuscript or getting it ready for publication.

book@booklaunch.london

BUSINESS SERVICES

The Small Library Company
Would you like your chaotic collection of personal books or papers culled or organised?
I am an experienced, qualified, non frumpy librarian who loves sorting out books and personal archives.
Give me a ring on 07495894939 or email meg.dillon@btinternet.com to discuss your library or archive needs.

TLS

Coming up in the TLS



September 11th: Fiction
September 18th: Middle East
September 25th: Crime
October 2nd: Film

To book an ad in these issues, please contact jonathan.drummond@the-tls.co.uk

From the field to the page

SAMURAI

HOW TO BE A MODERN SAMURAI

Ten steps to finding your power and achieving success

ANTONY CUMMINS

218pp. Watkins. £12.99.

Becoming a modern samurai is a full-time occupation if you follow Antony Cummins's precepts. You will have to learn meditation, acquire some swords, make sure your house is well defended, collect a band of followers to be your army, learn to spy on rival bands, and much else. You will also need to master the secrets of ninja and samurai magic and get to grips with Confucianism, Shinto, Buddhism and Taoism.

Cummins is an enthusiast for all things samurai and in particular ninja. He doesn't appear to speak Japanese or to have much experience in martial arts but with a Japanese translator he has produced many books, among them *The Book of Samurai* (2015), rewriting samurai and ninja texts for the Western reader.

In *How To Be a Modern Samurai* he takes the precepts, methods, philosophies and ways of operating of samurai generals and distills them into an action plan that one can apply to business or everyday life. The book is divided into ten steps broken down into a hundred lessons, "painstakingly researched from original medieval scrolls". He offers secrets for achieving mastery over the mind and body, "practical lessons for achieving the social status and outcomes you desire", together with references to famous samurai and quotes from medieval texts - though one would appreciate a bibliography and notes to back all this up.

Cummins's ten steps begin with controlling the mind and leading a samurai lifestyle. You will need to engage with Japanese culture, perhaps hosting a poetry party, trying Japanese painting or watching a Japanese drama. Cummins also offers instructions for building a tea house in your garden, together with a massively simplified adaptation of the tea ceremony.

As the book goes on the lessons become distinctly esoteric. The chapter on ninja arts includes cultivating spies, getting people to divulge secrets and studying ninja magic. Next comes samurai magic, such as writing Japanese characters in the air (not so easy if you don't know Japanese). Finally Cummins instructs us in the spiritual path. There's a beginner's guide to Confucianism, Taoism and Shinto. The author suggests building a Buddhist altar and praying there. If you don't know any Buddhist sutras, just make something up, he advises. Say these words, build these things and

you can call yourself a samurai.

How To Be a Modern Samurai contains plenty of fun and interesting stuff - ninja, samurai, magic. The problem is that Cummins's method seems to be the "have a go" school of samurai study. Unfortunately having a go - at Japanese poetry, painting, tea ceremony, Buddhism, whatever - is not the Japanese way, which is to find a teacher and go into a subject in depth, hone your skills until you can do it perfectly. It also seems unlikely that this book will help you succeed in business, no matter how many ninja spells you apply.

Lesley Downer

PAPER

THE NATURE OF THE PAGE

Poetry, papermaking and the ecology of texts in Renaissance England
JOSHUA CALHOUN
288pp. University of Pennsylvania Press. £45 (US \$55).

From the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries, paper was made from broken-down plant fibres. These fibres were turned first into textiles - linen, ships' sails, or rags - and then recycled into paper: when Shakespeare wrote in sonnet 16 of poetry's battle against "this bloody tyrant, Time", the page beneath his pen contained its own temporal multitudes. In *The Nature of the Page*, Joshua Calhoun points out how the papery form of that sonnet, as encountered in the archives, compels us to look back to its beginnings in "a field, flax seeds, and stalks, and rain, and sunlight, and the decayed bodies of things as nutrient-rich soil".

Forming a material intersection between environmental and literary studies, *The Nature of the Page* shows that the material qualities of paper - its durability, its scarcity - shape how early modern writers including Henry Vaughan and John Donne thought about their writing matter, and dictates the forms in which their texts survive today. Calhoun combines close literary reading with precise coverage of the material history of textual production. For example, chapter four ranges from an explanation of animal size (boiled-down gelatine which stops paper soaking up ink) to the imaginative affordances of sizing (a 1626 funeral sermon encourages individuals to see themselves as unsized paper, into which should sink a fear of God). One of the conclusions of this type of work is that intellectual history, in the broadest sense, is inextricable from its material forms: Calhoun invokes "hundreds of years of human ideas entangled in plant fibres".

The five chapters are divided between two sections ("Legible Ecologies" and "Indistinct Ecologies"), which distinguish aspects of book ecology noted by Renaissance writers from those "that were less visible to the average sixteenth and seventeenth-century book user and that are nearly invisible to us now". Chapter one provides a history of paper told predominantly through Matthias Koops's *Historical Account of the Substances which have been used to Describe Events, and Convey Ideas* (1800), itself printed on straw-paper. Chapter two shows how Henry Vaughan's "The Book" (1655) draws "multiple temporalities and actors (human and non-human) into a conversation about the translation of ideas to matter". The argument that we should look beyond human inputs of textual production runs throughout. The chapters in section two range beyond paper and the early modern period to read ink blots in a Folger Library copy of *The Second Part of King Henry IV*, and to connect the lastingness of books represented in John Donne's "Valediction of the Book" with the energy-guzzling air-conditioned environments of the Folger itself. If Calhoun struggles to preserve the partition between "legible" and "indistinct" ecologies that divides *The Nature of the Page*, then that struggle conversely suggests that traces of book ecology were ubiquitously legible to early modern eyes. Such a conclusion only strengthens the urgency for us to pay attention to the finite and slowly deteriorating forms that make up our archives.

Georgina Wilson

IN THE CLUBS

THE PHARMACIST JUSTIN DAVID

128pp. Salt Publishing. £8.99.

"There they are in the dark, men standing in circles ... while the rest of London goes about its business." Much crucial action takes place in a club's toilets in Justin David's *The Pharmacist*, now republished as a standalone novella after having gained cult success when it was released digitally in 2014. It is here that the twenty-four-year-old artist Billy Monroe - the novel's narrator - finds himself with his lover Jamie, both "dewy eyed and loose-limbed" on MDMA; only Billy is secretly seeing another man, one three times his age, the Polari-speaking drug dealer Albert Power - a louche veteran of the club scene, still in possession of a jawline reminiscent of Marlon Brando's.

It is Albert - the pharmacist of the book's title - who first introduces Billy to ecstasy. Meeting by chance on a London street, Billy and Albert are instantly attracted to

one another. "Billy feels a knowledge pass between them ... the kind of cruisy look he only gets from young guys". It is only later that Billy discovers that Albert is a neighbour in the block of Victorian maisonettes in Shoreditch where he lives. Their first encounter is described with a nuanced sensitivity, alive to the pathos of a vigorous and innocent young man beginning an affair with someone more experienced. When Billy asks Albert about his life, he's told: "I am all your failed expectations in a man". Yet the panama hat-wearing septuagenarian is more adventurous than his young lover. "I've done some acting. Used to be a singer", he confesses. An eccentric and an aesthete, Albert tells Billy that his "favourite authors are Genet and Proust, and that he never eats red meat on a Sunday and that he once had dinner with Dusty Springfield". When Albert confesses to losing the love of his life after a thirty-year relationship, Billy begins to paint the man's portrait from Albert's description of him. When he unveils this picture for Albert, Albert's lies begin to unravel, leading to the book's tragic conclusion.

A novella, as many great nineteenth-century European writers knew, is the perfect vehicle for depicting a love affair, and *The Pharmacist's* concise portrayal of Albert and Billy's doomed love recalls both Turgenev's *First Love* and Benjamin Constant's *Adolphe*. But the book is sharply contemporary. David has a painterly eye for the urban landscape of east London: "Above the flats, a textureless bruise of luminous grey-yellow spreads itself across the sky, like a patch of backlit vellum ... The cobblestones look like rivets in brown PVC". The galleries, artists' studios and pre-gentrification pubs of Shoreditch are brought vividly to life. As lubricious as early Alan Hollinghurst, *The Pharmacist* is a welcome reissue from Salt Publications, and the perfect introduction to a singular voice in gay literature.

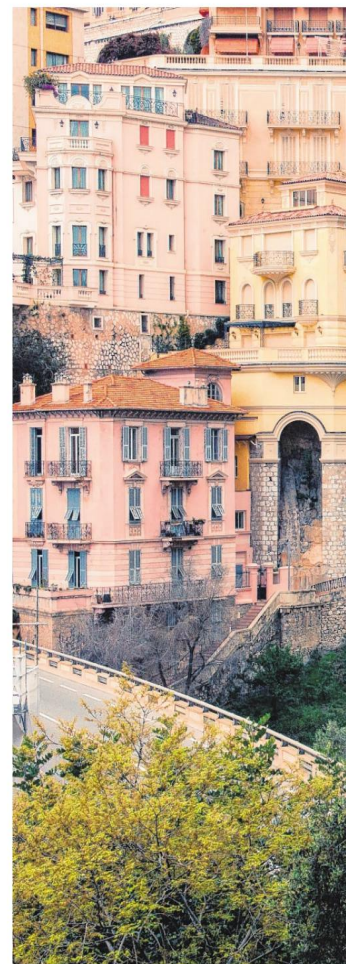
Jude Cook

PARTY GIRLS

MISS ALUMINIUM SUSANNA MOORE

288pp. Weidenfeld and Nicolson. £9.99.

Susanna Moore's erotically charged literary thriller, *In the Cut* - first published in 1995 - captivated a new generation of readers with its scalpel-sharp examination of sex and violence when it was reissued last year. Once again, it is the danger of being a woman - and particularly a beautiful woman - that comes to the fore in Moore's elegant, eye-opening memoir, *Miss Aluminium*.



"MC Monaco 01 2017"; from *Silent Cities* by Mat Hannek (120pp. Steidl. £45)

Her story begins like a fairy tale. Her mother dies - a loss that haunts the book - and is quickly replaced by an evil stepmother. With the help of an older, wealthy benefactress (a fairy godmother who gifts her four trunks of designer clothes, which the young, guileless girl uses as an "elegant disguise"), Moore leaves her home in Hawaii and sets off to make her way in the world. In New York (where she works first at the upmarket department store Bergdorf Goodman, then as a model), she is raped by the fashion designer Oleg Cassini. Later, shooting a movie on location in Acapulco, she is badly beaten up by the man she has married. Moore does not press charges, but the judge takes one look at her bruised and broken face and grants her an immediate divorce.

She settles in Los Angeles in the 1960s. There is plenty of glitz and glamour - she becomes great friends with Joan Didion and John Gregory Dunne (the latter is her first editor), works as a script reader for Warren Beatty, and has a relationship with Jack Nicholson - but Hollywood also has its dark side. She lives with Dick, the man who will become her second husband, and his roommate Roman Polanski (this is in 1970, after the infamous Cielo Drive murders). "I towered above him, but as I was invisible, it did not matter", she writes of Polanski. "I was too old to interest him, which allowed me to wander through the house as I



pleased." Moore is twenty-four, Polanski thirty-seven. She doesn't have to say anything else.

When it comes to her portrait of LA in the 1960s and 70s, Moore gives its most famous chroniclers, Didion and Eve Babitz, a run for their money. Not that one could call her a party girl of the Babitz variety; the demure detachment of her writing is closer to Didion's cool clarity. But where Didion's coolness possesses a degree of affectation - part of the writer persona she created - Moore's reserve is the result of her all too real naivety. This is the spellbinding story of a girl who has yet to find her voice.

Lucy Scholes

LIFE STUDIES

SALVAGE AT TWILIGHT DAN BURT

96pp. Carcanet. Paperback, £9.99.

Dan Burt is a poet from a corporate corner of the real world: *Salvage at Twilight* is his second full-length collection after a career in law and business. Like its predecessor, *We Look Like This* (2012), it is a compendium of prose memoir and short poems, the latter taking up two thirds of its length, and mostly consisting of life studies: it is clear Burt wishes to emulate Robert Lowell, albeit as very much his own man, though the influence is sometimes insufficiently digested, and the poems are occasionally too quick to get things over and done with. Still, they are

admirably gutsy and hearty, do not fight shy of bluntness, and often work amicably against loose but traceable formal constraints: in one, he murmurs "Traitor, as I stand, / cancelled blue passport in hand, / a grey haired alien on foreign land", and contemplates "Yankee Doodle verities, / poured into us as kids, / corroded loyalty to hostility". That's probably enough to ensure he gets the glove treatment at customs next time he flies stateside (Burt has for many years made his home in the UK). Another finds him in the library at Princeton, desperate to "muffle that devil at my ear / until it's almost impossible to hear / You're a wannabe from a trading floor". In another, "Surgeons probed the ruin / that six weeks ago was a woman".

Comparable subtlety crashes down everywhere: in an ekphrasis on a Paula Rego painting, in a run of elegies, in a description of shadowy dealings in Saudi Arabia where "Hydro-carbon hunger / unleashed these beasts / that remorselessly devour / Jeddah's ancient streets". Too much here is too flatly anecdotal, but Burt's relentless sketches are rarely uninteresting, and sometimes brusquely moving. The three chapters of prose memoir, though - the most consistently impressive pieces here - retain many of the more pleasing flourishes of his verse, while revealing a gift for lively mimetic narrative that Burt's poetry tends to neglect. "Arrogance is the winner's cancer", he writes near the start of the first, before candidly showing how in an eviscerating account of life in the often scandalous worlds of law and business in America - and, again, in

Saudi Arabia: "Raymond, I've told my clients they can't work under this contract; they'll leave Saudi first. He sits wordlessly for perhaps thirty seconds, leans slightly towards me, says softly *You know, Saudi's a dangerous place...*".

Rory Waterman

VATICAN POLITICS

THE OUTSIDER

Pope Francis and his battle to reform the Church
CHRISTOPHER LAMB

176pp. Orbis. Paperback, \$24.

Dispute over clashing models of church government is a familiar theme. In the Catholic world, the subject has long pitched centralizers against those supporting a more democratic style. Seldom, though, has a strong thirst for change come right from the top. That makes contemporary Vatican politics unusual - and unusually - unstable. For Christopher Lamb, the internal opposition faced by Pope Francis "has not been seen in centuries, if ever". In *The Outsider: Pope Francis and his battle to reform the Church*, he argues that the Pope faces a guerrilla-style insurgency waged by "worldly and clerical establishments".

Part of the problem hinges on the legacy of the Second Vatican Council (1962-5). Its vision was reformist. Among much else, the Church was to abandon its fortress mentality and model itself more along the lines of a field hospital. In liberal eyes, however, that vision was subsequently betrayed by con-

servatives (especially John Paul II and Benedict XVI) seeking a return to old certainties. Francis is a strong supporter of Vatican II. Since he was elected in 2013, his programme has included a greater role for episcopal synods and an emphasis on pastoral outreach. He has also sought to make the Vatican apparatus more ethnically diverse.

His critics, many of them based in the United States, have accused the Pope of selling the pass, often citing his softening of the Church's stance on Communion for divorced and remarried Catholics, along with his willingness to reconsider compulsory celibacy in regions such as the Amazon, where few have access to a priest. In 2017, more than sixty theologians and senior clerics (four of them cardinals) accused the Pope of endorsing heretical propositions in a document labelled a "filial correction".

Lamb sees much of the opposition to Francis as political and economic, as well as theological, pointing to alliances made by some in the Church with Steve Bannon, Matteo Salvini and other hardline populists. Francis, he writes, has become a "prime target for supporters of the Trumpian politics gaining traction across Europe". Lamb makes his case against Francis's critics in itemized form, pointing to the unsubstantiated claims made by a former papal ambassador to the United States about the Pope's handling of sexual abuse cases, as well as selective reporting from ostensibly objective portions of the Catholic media. These incidents and others are catalogued in the book's final chapter, "Timeline of Opposition", about many attempts to undermine Francis and his reforms.

Though not entirely uncritical of the Pope, Lamb, who is the *Tablet's* Rome correspondent, is largely sympathetic to his subject's agenda. The facts as he reports them suggest that the Pope faces much more than loyal dissent. They also suggest that, judged in the light of his mission to implement Vatican II fully, and despite this fierce opposition, Francis has made progress, even if his more liberal supporters suggest he hasn't gone far enough.

Harry Readhead

FILM

THE FILMS THAT MADE ME ... PETER BRADSHAW

560pp. Bloomsbury. Paperback, £16.99.

The Films That Made Me ... is a selection of Peter Bradshaw's *Guardian* reviews of the past twenty years. The book's various sections complete its title in various ways: these are the films that made Bradshaw "feel good" or "feel bad"; that made him "laugh" or made him "cry". Above all, they show that Bradshaw loves cinema

but hates pretentiousness. Agreeing with Paul Fussell, Bradshaw believes that the "really insidious bad things are not straightforward shock or honest hokum, but middlebrow affectation": "It's the films which pointedly raise their claim to be truly artistic and good for you, films which are drinking their tea with their pinky raised, almost stupefied with their own supposed cultural superiority ... Spleen is an important critical organ".

Bradshaw is a specialist in spleen expressed with humour. He may light-versify his review to satirize the badness of a film, for example, injecting verve into what otherwise would be a lifeless critical enterprise. The trying side of being a reviewer is not hidden. Attentive to popular imagination but contemptuous of entertainment cliché, he has an amusing impatience with certain blockbuster Hollywood formulas; some sharp asides are saved for Michael Bay (he of the sanity-busting *Transformers* franchise). By contrast, Bradshaw's interests cross national cinemas, genres and budgets.

From new release to re-release, Bradshaw is often both entertaining and persuasive. "A sound like a batgloved fist smacking into a cupped palm is what the film delivers: only deafeningly amplified and clarified with crisp, digital precision. It is the sound of all recent super-hero movies getting their asses well and truly kicked." That's a lasting judgement on the second instalment in Christopher Nolan's Batman trilogy, *The Dark Knight*, and one that tonally captures something of the impact and spectacle of that film. Bradshaw is equally astute when it comes to a film's enduring qualities, such as those of Ridley Scott's *Alien*. "There is none of our modern screenwriting need to provide story arcs, lenient human touches and love interest. Everything is about mood, fear, violence and horror - and Sigourney Weaver left alone to combat evil without feeling the need to do so in romantic consort with a man. After twenty-five years, *Alien* looks better than ever."

Away from the blockbusters, Bradshaw writes equally well about European directors such as Michael Haneke and the recent wave of stylistically bold documentarists. A keen sense of cinematic influence emerges here. There are also moments when he overpraises a film, and the reader feels the flattening arbitrariness of a critic stuck with a five-star rating system (both Kenneth Lonergan's *Margaret* and *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* receive top marks). If anything, Bradshaw tends to be too forgiving - a natural tendency for an enthusiastic week-to-week film reviewer, perhaps. As he explains, the reviewer has to "make a value judgement, and risk being in a minority. It isn't enough to measure and analyse the limb. You have to go out on it". ■

Shwan Ziad



The essential colporteur

A pioneering, unheroic history of the printed book

An edited review by Theodore K. Rabb of *The Coming of the Book* by Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, translated by David Gerard, first published on October 14, 1977. The TLS archive is available free online to subscribers.

IN ITS MOST FERTILE period, during the twenty years or so following the Second World War, the *Annales* school of French historians produced a remarkable series of truly seminal books. Few monographs assume the status of classics, and fewer still are recognized as such in the lifetimes of their authors, but from Paris in these decades there came at least half a dozen. Considering their stature, it is extraordinary that English translations have begun to appear only in the past three or four years. The present volume, for instance, published nearly twenty years after the original edition, is long overdue. It ranks easily among the most consequential works of recent French scholarship, yet its impact has undoubtedly been blunted by the lack of a translation. To be fair, reviews and reviewers can scarcely be expected to spot winners at the hour of their birth; nevertheless, the attention the English-speaking world has given, not only to this book, but to the entire genre it initiated, has borne little relation to its importance. The *TLS* can perhaps be forgiven for having bestowed no notice at all on *L'Apparition du livre* in 1958; the slow recognition accorded by scholars outside France to "The History of the Book" (as the sub-field has come to be known) in the interim is less excusable.

The approach devised by Lucien Febvre, and developed to full maturity by his distinguished disciple Henri-Jean Martin, is deceptively simple. Without denying the value of the vast traditional literature on the subject, they leave aside the themes it has pursued since the days of the first bibliophile-connoisseurship, the dating of editions, problems of attribution, disputes over priority in inventions, the history of individual titles, the *oeuvre* of different printers, publishers, booksellers, or illustrators, and the study of particular advances or successes. Instead, they try to see the picture as a whole, and ask questions about books not for their own sakes, but as artifacts of the societies that produced, bought, and read them. They are concerned less with the name and starting-date of the first press

than with the reasons printing came to be of interest at all in the mid-fifteenth century. To give another example: they do not consider the issues of finance and distribution to be peripheral to the main subject, but treat them as significant evidence both of Europe's economic and business structure and of the nature of publishing itself.

Taking as their point of departure the needs printing could serve, and the effects it could have, Febvre and Martin try to be precise about the place of books in European history. They are little tempted to celebrate great inventions, heroic explorers, or beautiful objects. Indeed, their inclination is to be as sceptical as possible about the larger claims made for the press by contemporaries and posterity. They emphasize, for instance, the importance of the discovery and improvement of paper as a precondition for the development of printing. Paper gets an entire chapter, whereas the usual homages to Gutenberg and to various technical breakthroughs receive paragraphs or less. The conditions, rather than the individual geniuses, are what count. And instead of adopting the reverential attitude that has been common since Francis Bacon placed printing alongside gunpowder and the compass as the great transformers of the Renaissance world, they take caution as their watchword. In the long run, it is true, books helped bring about vital changes in thought and attitude. But the initial effect, according to Febvre and Martin, was often ambiguous.

They point out, first, that publication frequently gave a new lease of life to works that otherwise might not have survived. The instinct was conservative, especially among the authorities who controlled production. In the authors' words:

Although printing certainly helped scholars in some fields, on the whole it could not be said to have hastened the acceptance of new ideas or knowledge. In fact, by popularizing long cherished beliefs, strengthening traditional prejudices and giving authority to seductive fallacies, it could even be said to have represented an obstacle to the acceptance of many new views. Even after new discoveries were made they tended to be ignored and reliance continued to be placed in conventional authorities. Such an assessment depends on a confident judgment of what is valuable or not, and Febvre and Martin do not hesitate: "Where time had not begun

Travelling bookseller, fifteenth century. Illustration for *Paris à travers les siècles* by H. Gourdon de Genouillac, 1897

“Paper gets an entire chapter, whereas the usual homages to Gutenberg and to various technical breakthroughs receive paragraphs or less

to winnow the wheat from the chaff [among books by contemporaries] there was an even higher proportion of valueless work ... The number of authors getting into print on scientific subjects rose each year, but the majority of works were of no lasting scientific interest."

More recent scholars might be less cavalier, arguing that the very growth of science was what mattered, and they might give greater weight to the innovative consequences of printing. Yet few historians of the book have been as careful as Febvre and Martin not to run ahead of their evidence. Such sobriety is unusual among pioneers, but it did not prevent them from asserting those claims they felt they could justify. For example, they portray the first publishers and booksellers as epitomes of the new entrepreneurship of the sixteenth century. This golden age, full of remarkable figures like Aldus and Plantin, is duly appreciated—not just for its contributions to scholarship or its creation of lovely works of art, but for its transformation of patterns of communications. And in two of the three overview sections at the end of the book, Febvre and Martin argue beyond demur that printing was essential both to the spread of the Reformation and to the establishment of Europe's modern languages. The francophilia apparent throughout their analysis is especially evident here—the French Reformation receives more than three times the space of the German—but the general case is amply demonstrated none the less.

These final sections have been the springboard for the new historical genre Febvre and Martin inspired. If the disciples have often tended to be more enthusiastic than the masters, it has to be admitted that the treatment of the Reformation and of language opened up the most exhilarating prospects. Still, it is also worth recalling that the first of the three overview sections at the end of the book, an assessment of the links between printing and humanism, makes a strikingly different case. Its theme is how general intellectual concerns shaped printing, rather than the other way around. In recent work, by contrast, the press has all too easily come to be regarded as an independent force. The attempt to understand books as they relate to a larger society has been extraordinarily fruitful, but the example of the pioneers reminds us that the lines of influence move equally strongly in both directions.

Since 1958, research into the "History of the Book" has concentrated increasingly on the lower orders whom the *Annales* scholars have made their particular métier. Martin himself has continued his magisterial studies into all aspects of the book in France during the early modern period. Others, notably Robert Mandrou, Geneviève Bollème, and Marc Soriano, have focused on popular literature and popular culture. These investigations overlap with another new Gallic genre, the history of *mentalités*, but they retain their distinct origins in the preoccupations of Febvre and Martin with the book as material object. The chief non-French echo has come from the United States, where Elizabeth Eisenstein, Robert Darnton, and Natalie Davis have all enlarged our appreciation of the influence of printing. Eisenstein has confronted general issues; Darnton and Davis have kept their sights on France between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries.

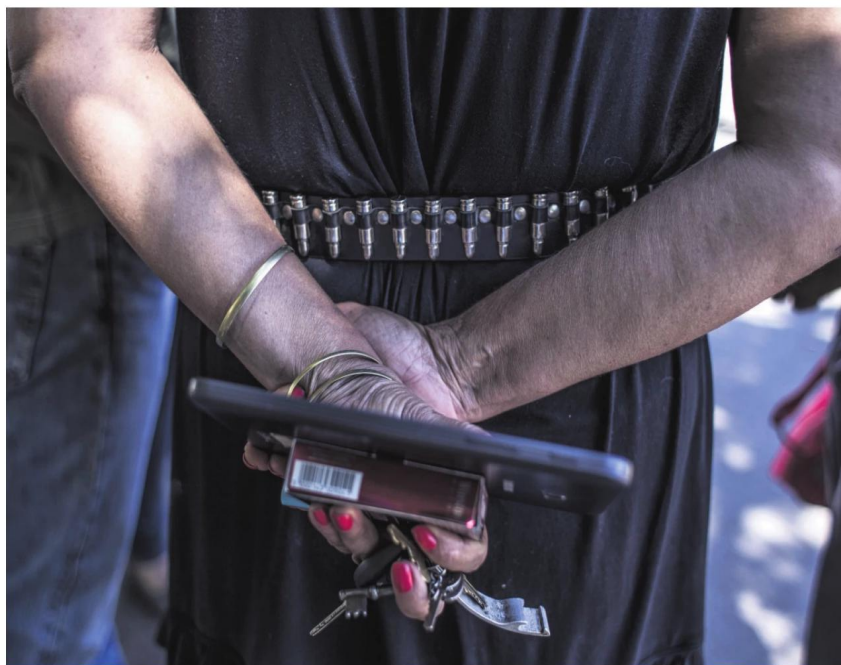
If Febvre and Martin revealed the ways in which books created new trades and professions, extended scholarship, and changed beliefs and languages, we can now see printing in an even richer context. The *colporteur*, the ubiquitous peddler who brought books and almanacs to the humblest of all regions, and who reported local interests back to the bookseller or publisher, has become an essential figure in early modern society. The full range of the printing business, which called on paper makers, rag suppliers, ink manufacturers, and endless transport, has taken its proper place as a sophisticated exemplar of capitalist enterprise. And there is growing recognition that the relationship between so-called "elite" and "popular" culture was far more complicated than the traditional stereotypes of mass ignorance and boorishness would lead one to suppose ... ■

In next week's

TLS

DAMON GALGUT

Murder in South Africa



PLUS

Edmund Gordon Re-experiencing Martin Amis

Beejay Silcox Hari Kunzru's rabbit hole

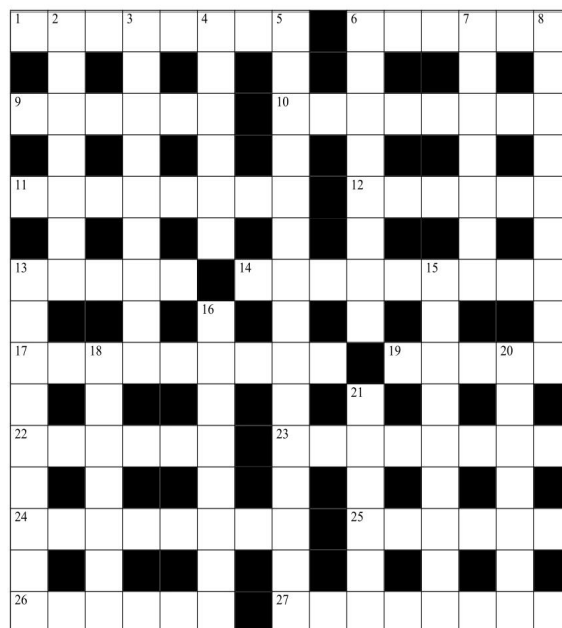
Andrew Stark William James can save your life

Editor **MARTIN IVENS** (editor@the-tls.co.uk)
 Managing Editor **ROBERT POTTS** (robert.potts@the-tls.co.uk)
 Assistant to the Editor **VICKY WILLIAMS** (victoria.williams@the-tls.co.uk)
 Editorial enquiries (queries@the-tls.co.uk)

Managing Director **JAMES MACMANUS** (deborah.keegan@news.co.uk)
 Advertising Manager **JONATHAN DRUMMOND** (jonathan.drummond@the-tls.co.uk)

Correspondence and deliveries: **1 London Bridge Street, London SE1 9GF**
 Telephone for editorial enquiries: **020 7782 5000**
 Subscriptions and subscription enquiries: **UK/ROW: feedback@the-tls.co.uk 0800 048 4236; US/Canada: custsvcs@timesupl.com 1-844 208 1515**
 Missing a copy of your TLS: **USA/Canada: +1 844 208 1515; UK & other: +44 (0) 203 308 9146**
 Back issues: **020 7640 3888** tls@ocsmmedia.net (website: www.ocsmmedia.net/tls)
 Syndication : **020 7711 7888** enquiries@newssyndication.com

TLS CROSSWORD 1341 BY PRAXITELES



ACROSS

- 1** "One of our coach-horses fell sick of the —, so as he was ready to fall down" (Pepys) (8)
6 Is "mouth" mostly another way of putting it? (6)
9 19's Don Juan joins English King in an uprising (6)
10 Like one of Chaucer's pilgrims, Catholic and mischievous, we hear (8)
11 Like the Cosa Nostra, note, I'm all I may be (8)
12 Bill, that's next to Dickens's mutual friend, is the one to beat (6)
13 He scored 14 in program on television (5)
14 Poems written by Maupin's Anna at end of series (9)
17 Story of a musical Webber finally managed to back (9)
19 Drive round to see one who scored (5)
22 Bill, that's almost entirely free (6)
23 By the end of Dorrit Dickens is one like Byron or Shelley, according to Southey (8)
24 Swift's Betty; is she endlessly absorbed by work on reflection? (8)
25 Sponge off a fool on heroin (6)
26 Size of space allocated to van der Rohe to broadcast awards (6)
27 Parliament in uproar by the end of budget (8)

DOWN

- 2** It's upsetting to Conrad losing chapter in a version of Typhoon (7)
3 Featuring a toga, Ridley S. fabricated, could be, yes, — (9)
4 Miss Lanier, for instance, role for mezzo in 21 (6)
5 19 produced this European service composed by 13A 19 (8, 7)
6 "It was he / That made the — of thy treasons to us" (King Lear) (8)
7 Girl, one chasing Joe Sedley's valet (7)
8 One hard man, a poor actor, sent up by a guru (9)
13 The other 13's invested ill-gotten gain for philosopher (9)
15 Where actors go to see 19 in English singularly putting 21 up (5, 4)
16 Immediately note French art regulations (8)
18 Strange rime about English Queen composed by 19 (7)
20 Scorn when India's ruined after start of devolution (7)
21 Old Rossini character at start of opera, one by 19 (6)

SOLUTION TO CROSSWORD 1337

The winner of Crossword 1337 is Peter Gregson, of Bucks

The sender of the first correct solution opened on September 25, 2020, will receive a cash prize of £40. Entries should be addressed to TLS Crossword 1341, 1 London Bridge Street, London SE1 9GF



Ranch writing

Not long ago we mused on the literary offerings of American presidents. Who among them was the most prolific? Donald Trump scores well, having issued roughly a book a year between 1997 and 2011, including *How to Get Rich*, *Why We Want You to Be Rich*, *Think Big* and *Kick Ass*. Only a spoilsport would object that the President did not write every word himself (his most loyal ghost is Meredith McIver, a former ballerina). John F. Kennedy's best-known book is *Profiles in Courage* (1956), for which he is said to have been "extensively helped" by Ted Sorensen. Nevertheless, the book was issued under Kennedy's name alone and was awarded a Pulitzer Prize. Jimmy Carter has published many books, including collections of his poems and paintings. Even Trump in his literary prime falls short of President Carter.

There are others, needless to say: Barack Obama has proved himself an intellectual, but in terms of range no writerly American president competes with Theodore Roosevelt (1858-1919), who served for two terms beginning in 1901. *Theodore Roosevelt: A descriptive bibliography* by Heather G. Cole, building on earlier work by R. W. G. Vail, lists forty-nine titles, the first published in 1877 when the author was still a teenager. *Summer Birds of the*

Adirondacks is merely a single sheet folded into a four-page leaflet, but it was based on the author's field work, as were subsequent writings on the natural world. Twenty years later, while president, he put out another leaflet, *List of Birds Seen in the White House Grounds*. It is beyond Ms Cole's duties to say what they were, but we can help. The president's feathered friends numbered ninety-three (including some observed in and around Washington "during his administration"). In the grounds of the White House he had a resident screech owl, a pair of sparrowhawks, a ruby-throated hummingbird, nuthatches and waxwings, red-headed woodpeckers, treecreepers and much else. When the birds nested, he made a note of it. His white-throated sparrow "sang all through the winter" of 1905. The young man's bird-watching in the Adirondacks had served him well. If only President Trump could be persuaded to turn his attention to a comparable White House list, it would produce interesting results.

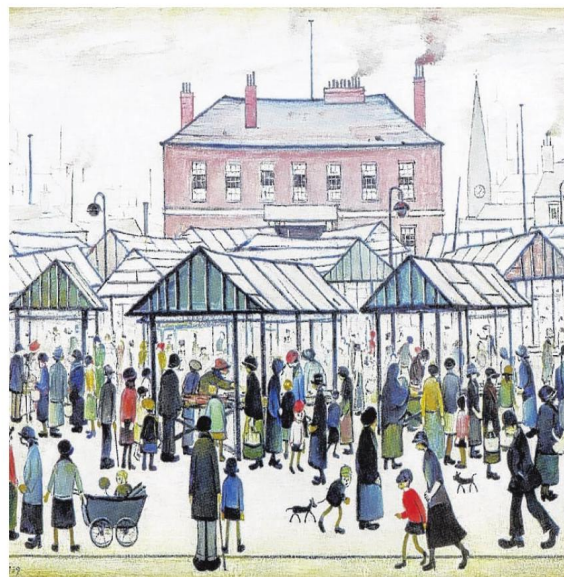
Most of Roosevelt's natural history is of a kind less likely to appeal to a modern sensibility. Nine books have the words "hunting", "hunter", "hunter" or "game" in the title. *The Winning of the West*, first issued in 1889 in two volumes, later in three, then four, proceeds under chapter

headings such as "The Southern Backwoodsmen Overwhelm the Cherokees". It was reprinted many times and, Ms Cole says, "remained popular throughout TR's life".

Four years earlier, Roosevelt put out *Hunting Trips of a Ranchman*, with illustrations such as "Head of Grizzly Bear" and "Chasing the Wild Turkey with Greyhounds". Ms Cole reports that the book was widely reviewed on both sides of the Atlantic. Readers of the *Athenaeum* in London were told that "his pen is as eloquent as his rifle is effective". Even so pastoral sounding a work as *A Book-Lover's Holidays in the Open* starts with "A Cougar Hunt on the Rim of the Grand Canyon".

Roosevelt's early books were published by G.H. Putnam's, but financial arrangements were complex and success was often slow to come. For *Hunting Trips*, "TR contributed \$5,000 towards the publication costs". By 1898, three years after publication, "Putnam's had sold 458 copies total. TR did not recoup his initial investment in the book".

Big subjects could result in short books: *New York* (1891) runs to 127 pages; *Oliver Cromwell* (1900) to 136. *A Note on the Irish Theatre* (1912) is what it says: its twenty-three leaves ("blank on versos") are shared with George Bernard Shaw, who adds "An 'Interview' on the Irish Players in America" to Roosevelt's note. *Theodore Roosevelt* is handsomely produced, as always, by Oak Knoll Press (\$75).



John Dos Passos featured as the seventh of our Writers Who Are More or Less Forgotten (NB, May 8). What we ourselves had forgotten is that there is a prize in his memory, and a well-established one. The John Dos Passos Prize for Literature was founded at Longwood College (now University), Virginia, in 1980. The first recipient was Graham Greene, but the terms of entry were thereafter altered to allow only Americans to be considered. The winner was intended to be "the best currently under-recognized American writer in the middle of their career" - a way of saying More or Less Forgotten. But was Tom Wolfe unrecognized in 1984? Or was he the most celebrated nonfiction writer in the land? The 1982 prize went to Robert Stone - after his two best-known novels had been published - and has more recently gone to Colson Whitehead, as well as many we haven't heard of.

The present finalists are Alexander Chee, Aleksander Hemon, Gish Jen, Dana Johnson, Hari Kunzru and Valeria Luiselli. If you're looking for the "under-recognized", don't look there. Ms Luiselli, for example, born in 1983 and known for *Lost Children Archive*, has been awarded a MacArthur Fellowship (\$650,000), a Vilek Prize (\$100,000) and a Folio Prize (£30,000), in addition to others. The \$2,000 offered by the Dos Passos, should the judges favour her, will help to shore it up.

L.S. Lowry's "Market Scene, Northern Town", painted in oils in 1939, is reproduced in *Lowry's Lamps* by Richard Mayson (Unicorn, £20), a study of the artist's use of street lighting. At the end of the 1930s, Mayson writes, "Lowry made a change to his streetlamps, presumably in tune with the changing times". The lamps here are "larger, more modern" than those that figure in earlier paintings. Taking a critical approach to an artist through his lampposts might seem eccentric to some, but Mayson has been "passionate about street furniture from childhood" and his readings are informed and observant. In his eyes, "the lamppost becomes the key to Lowry's Kingdom".

If you happen to be planning a post-lockdown visit to London and are in search of accommoda-

tion, it is worth considering the Penn Club. Spread over three linked houses in Bedford Square - Central London doesn't get more central than this - the club is open to members and non-members alike. It was founded in 1920, but all centenary celebrations have had to be put on hold for reasons it is unnecessary to outline. The maximum stay nowadays is twenty-eight nights, but long-term residency was once allowed. John Wyndham lived at the Penn Club in the 1950s and wrote *Day of the Triffids* - possibly in one of the rooms in which you now may eat, take tea or read the *TLS*. Before the club's founding, the building was home to Jane Franklin, wife of the lost polar explorer Sir John Franklin, the inspiration behind that melancholy ballad, "Lord Franklin's Dream", which in turn inspired "Bob Dylan's Dream".

The Penn Club secretary tells us that during the lockdown the building was used to house NHS key workers, free of charge. "We were founded by members of the Friends Ambulance Unit after the First World War so it seemed appropriate that we offered our building to help with the crisis." As a result of the pandemic, the club is at risk "of having to close permanently". Visitors to London as a whole have dropped significantly, and to the Penn Club proportionately. Apart from that, what's not to like? Quiet, literary, inexpensive, with civility and courtesy guaranteed.

J.C.

© The Times Literary Supplement Limited, 2020. Published in print and all other derivative formats by The Times Literary Supplement Limited, 1 London Bridge Street, London SE1 9GF, England. Telephone: 020 7782 5000 E-mail: letters@tls.co.uk without whose express permission no part may be reproduced. US copy printed by Stellar Printing Inc, 38-38 9th Street, Long Island City, NY 11101. UK rest of world copy printed by Newsprinters (Knowles) Limited, Killing Road, Prescott, Merseyside, L34 9HN, England. EUROPEAN PRICES: Belgium €4.20, France €4.20, Germany €4.95, Greece €4.95, Italy €4.75, Netherlands €4.95, Portugal €4.20, Spain €4.20. TLS Subscription rates (all 12 months/50 issues): PRINT: USA USD175, Canada (Air freight) CAD225, UK £115, Rest of World (Airmail) £165. DIGITAL: USA USD50, Canada CAD50, UK £50, Rest of World £50. THE COMPLETE WORKS (Print and digital): USA USD185, Canada CAD230, UK £120, Rest of World £170. Call +1-844-208-1515 (USA & Canada) or +44 (0) 203 308 9146 (rest of the world) or visit the.tls.co.uk/buy to subscribe. Full subscription terms apply at the.tls.co.uk/terms-conditions



The addition to your edition

Complement your copy with *Freedom, Books, Flowers & the Moon*, a weekly podcast from the *TLS*. Thea Lenarduzzi is joined by a variety of guests, from novelists to philosophers, poets to cultural commentators.

Subscribe to the podcast today at the.tls.co.uk/podcast

